ELIZA

Act I: Caricature

Part I

I Reincarnated as a Noble Girl Villainess But Why Did It Turn Out This Way?

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WORLD MAP

Bandishia Plateau
Densel Dukedom
Jugfena Royal Domain
Rindarl Union
Stadel Domain
Kaldia Domain
Monster Forest
Royal Capital
Arxia Kingdom
Genas Domain
Planates Dukedom
Various Lesser Countries

Many thanks to user cheshiretwilight for doing an awesome job on the map!

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Eliza Kaldia

The main character of this story. In her previous life, she had played a medieval European fantasy otome game that's become the setting of this story, and she's reincarnated as a villainous noble girl character in the game, but her life is taking an unexpected direction.

Earl Terejia / Siegmund Terejia

An elderly noble sent by the royal capital to be Eliza's guardian. A former priest noble without his own lands.

Kamil Novak

A young man in service to Eliza. His father had been a major merchant from another country. Calls Eliza "Charlie" for some unknown reason.

Rashiok

A draconis that Eliza is raising.

Mrs. Galton / Kerry Sakir Galton

A nanny hired by Earl Terejia. From the area of Greenfield, she has some unique views on femininity.

Gunther Pavel

A young soldier in the Kaldia domain's army. Eliza's sword

and spear instructor. As a former bandit, his mouth is quite foul.

Marquis Rittergau / Radian Terejia Rittergau

Earl Terejia's older brother, the head of the Terejia family. The prime minister of Arxia.

Priest Faris

A high-ranking priest that is friends with Earl Terejia.

Elise Sherstok

A sickly girl that's recuperating in the Kaldia domain. The daughter of Baron Sherstok.

Bellway Musser

Earl Terejia's secretary.

Maya

Elise Sherstok's maid.

Elise Cherstoka / Ratoka

A child under the protection of Eliza.

Claudia Rolentsor

A girl that's staying in Kaldia as one of Eliza's companions. As a member of the Rolentsor family, she excels in martial arts. Is absolutely terrible at remembering names.

Margrave Molton

The lord of the Molton domain. A silver-haired handsome young man. Has a son the same age as Eliza. He dotes on his son, and loves children.

Mrs. Hortensia

A nanny hired by Earl Terejia. Has a difficult to grasp personality.

Paulo Levski

A cavalry soldier-in-training belonging to the Kaldia domain's army. Is agile and courageous.

Ergnade Einsbark

The leader of the 1st Cavalry Platoon at Fort Jugfena. About the same age as Eliza's father had been. Earl Einsbark's third son.

Earl Einsbark

In charge of the Jugfena royal domain as well as the highest-ranking commander at Fort Jugfena. A knight in the prime of life.

Volmar Einsbark

The leader of the cavalry troops at Fort Jugfena. Earl Einsbark's eldest son.

Wiegraf Einsbark

The military strategist of the cavalry troops at Fort Jugfena. Earl Einsbark's second son. Is skinny like his mother.

Teomer Terit

The young leader of the Shiru tribe.

CHAPTER 1
POISONED SOUP

Inside my head, rather than whiting out, it was more like my head was being filled with darkness.

Without hesitation, I sunk the hemlock into the pot of soup. I didn't know what kind of face I was making or where I was looking at all. With leather gloves that were way too big for me on my hands, I thought it looked silly and felt like laughing at it.

Although I cried when I first decided to poison my family, I have no more tears to cry now.

As I looked at the finely ground poison while being extremely careful not to touch it, my head was completely filled with blankness, with no space whatsoever for emotion to get in.

Luckily, on the dinner table was a large quantity of seafood and other delicacies that my vile mother probably got somewhere from unscrupulous merchants. The irony is, this was all supposed to be in celebration of my birthday today. I just happened to recognize a poisonous plant from my previous world, maybe the merchants that sold this food had tried to assassinate us, is what I thought people would think. No matter what, I probably wouldn't be suspected due to my age.

Viscount Kaldia and his family that was famous for being villainous, all died, leaving their daughter Eliza who had just turned two as the only survivor. For the crime of poisoning the viscount's entire family, a merchant who was once again famous for being villainous was executed.

……And that is the story of how I, Eliza Kaldia, succeeded the position of a Junior Viscount.

Since hemlock is a poisonous plant that doesn't take effect immediately, I thought that maybe someone would survive, but it seems my fears were unfounded. They either died due to a lack of oxygen caused by paralysis, or choked to death on hurl that got caught in their throat, or hit their head and died as they lost consciousness, there was a rich variety in the way that my family died, but the scene that my crime had caused wasn't even able to traumatize me.

In my previous life, hemlock had caused my younger sister to become hospitalized, causing quite a commotion. Because it almost killed her, it had remained as a frightening memory up until now, so it's ironic that I've now used that memory to poison and kill others.

It would be no lie to say that my mean, base mother was interested in nothing but money, and my father's favorite interest was to see blood and pain along with contorted facial expressions, so this was their punishment. And since all my relatives were wiped out, as the only survivor of the Kaldia family I inherited everything.

Of course, taking my age into consideration, it was impossible for me to actually run the Kaldia family, so this seems to have sown the seeds of a pointless power struggle among the conservative nobles in this country. Well, if they all crush each other, it might even turn out to be a good thing for me.

Obviously since I was only a two year old infant, I wasn't even considered a suspect in my family's assassination even though I was the one who benefitted the most by inheriting everything, but of course I wouldn't be able to take up the duties that came with being a Viscount immediately. For the time being, the royal capital sent someone to become my

guardian. That the person who came would be more human than my father, was all I wished for. After all, if someone came here who was just like my father, then I wouldn't know for what I even killed my family for. It's not even funny to think about how rotten this country must be if that were to be the case.

Although I don't know if the heavens responded to my dearest wish, the vigorous elderly aristocrat that the royal capital sent to me let out a terrible wail at seeing the terrible state of my family's lands and economic situation.

From haphazardly stacked bills and debts, to the countless number of idiotic, despotic laws and higher taxes than permitted that had been enacted illegally despite the country's national laws. The people in this domain had been under such a tyrannic regime that they were too exhausted to even complain. Meaning, the people in my domain are all tattered to the point of falling apart. I can safely say that hell would be something like this.

Of course, I was powerless to do anything about this.

Therefore, no matter how elderly my guardian was, until I became an adult, or at least until I matured and was able to provisionally take power, it is imperative that I rebuild my domain no matter how difficult it was. After all, that's why I killed all six of my family members, my parents and all my siblings.

Well..... I guess, there's also one more reason. And that reason is related to why I was able to carry out this assassination. Long story short, it's because I'm someone who reincarnated into this world.

Cutting to the chase, I'm able to recall that this world seems to be that of an otome game that I played in my previous world. Of course, I didn't know this right when I was born. I

figured this out when I heard a maid singing one of this country's lullabies to me.

The supreme power in the northwest of the continent, the Arxia Kingdom. That's the country I was born into, the country where Viscount Kaldia's lands are located. From the lullaby, and from day to day life here, I think that life here is similar to medieval Europe..... probably. Well, I only have a rough idea of what that would be like. After all, I wasn't that interested in history in my previous life, nor was I all that interested in foreign countries. But, I'm certain that there was no such country called the Arxia Kingdom in my previous world.

However, the reason why I'm certain this is a different world, is that this country's name just happened to be that of one in a game I played in my previous world. What made me certain of it, was myself. Or more accurately speaking, it was the name given to me, and the way my family was.

Eliza Kaldia. Combined with the Arxia Kingdom, that's not simply a coincidence of European naming anymore. The unfortunate thing was, my name matched exactly with the name of one of the game characters.

I hate this name, is what I first thought when I recognized my name.

After all, it was easy to associate this name with the Eliza Kaldia that had appeared in the game, a truly repulsive, villainous game character. The youngest daughter of the Kaldia family, the family whose misdeeds piled up so much that they were eventually executed by the country. Even though she was born as an aristocrat, without even thinking about why she was allowed to have a higher position than commoners, she seems to misunderstand commoners as nothing more than garbage to be stepped upon, is the type of character that she was written to be.

At first I thought it was just a coincidence, but after seeing the characteristics of my family, and when finding out that the name of the country I lived in matched the Arxia Kingdom in the game, I had to admit it even if I hated the idea. Meaning, this must be the same Arxia Kingdom as from the game.

Then, what I immediately thought about was what would eventually happen in the game.

The story was that the heroine would come over from the neighboring country to the Arxia Kingdom's school where many nobles gathered in order to find a marriage partner.

Obstructing the heroine, I suppose you could call her the rival, as someone meant only to give the heroine difficulties, was the viscount's daughter, Eliza Kaldia, and no matter which ending you ended up on, her entire family would be executed.

After all, even if you take away Eliza's actions at school, since her family's crimes within their own lands wouldn't change, the only difference between the different paths in the game was how fast they would all be executed, is what I remembered.

I had originally borrowed this game from my younger sister in order to kill time, but now that I've reincarnated into this world I need to really think things through clearly.

No matter what, I definitely won't face a future like that in the game. With the current situation, I figured that I would eventually be executed.

With that taken into consideration, among other things, helped me decide to poison my entire family. Something like a destruction flag, I'm going to utterly destroy it to the roots as early as possible.

……As a result I feel like I've done something even worse than the Eliza in the game. After all, I assassinated my entire family. I don't know the specifics of the laws in this country, but, from

what I remember hearing about laws in medieval Europe, the crime of killing your family was said to be punished by quartering. Well, since I used poison, I might also be called a witch and burned at the stake.

Since I have no intention of suffering through such painful executions, I'm going to take this secret about my family's deaths with me to the grave.

From now on, since I can't do anything right now, I'll just leave rebuilding my domain to my guardian, and it probably won't be a problem for me to live quietly for now. Fortunately, it seems that he was even able to calculate how much money would be required to rebuild my domain, my guardian, the Senior Earl Terejia, seemed to be quite a capable person. My father can't even compare. .....Once I become the family head I wish I could change my name back to Maria, and as for why it's probably because my personality in the previous life has greatly affected my life in this one. Oh well, countries like Austria and France don't exist here.

CHAPTER 2
GOLDEN SEA

Two years passed. In just two years, my domain has changed greatly. Outside my window, all that I could see beyond the fence, was rippling waves of wheat. He's done quite well in only two years, is what I was thinking, Earl Terejia can be proud of what he's accomplished.

Due to the despotism of the Kaldia family, the people's resources here had been stretched to the limits. Since my shallow father had been scared of rebellion, he repressed the people so much, that was the biggest problem of this domain. If they don't work in the fields, then there will be less income. Even an idiot could see that this would only eventually lead to self-ruin.

But, saying that my father did not completely understand the famine issues within my domain, might have been an exaggeration. He knew that repressing the people as much as he did would reduce income. Then, how did he maintain such an opulent lifestyle in bad taste?

……When I learned about my family's incredibly evil "source of income," I was unable to stop myself from throwing up at the bottomless pits of human desire and evil, even if he was my own father.

Among the punishments for people in this domain, there's something called forced labor. Basically, putting someone to work. With my common sense from the previous world, there wasn't really anything like this in my country, so at first I was a bit confused.

When my father started the forced labor system nineteen years ago, he would take girls from twelve to eighteen years

old, and boys from ten to fifteen years old, and force them into sex service. Without sugarcoating it, he was basically treating the domain's people as slaves.

In the Arxia Kingdom, "slavery" is considered illegal.

It's clearly stated in national law that slavery is illegal, but, it's only there in the first place because the state church, the Ar Xia church, protested slavery on a large scale. The actuality is that most commoners are under a system similar to slavery, called serfdom, in this country.

Father, with his despicable cleverness, came up with this trick to get around the title of "slavery." First, saying that this wasn't a demotion or a lifetime thing like slavery. Also, sending the gathered laborers to other domains to work as well. Calling this only as "labor" to the very end.

In this country, no, on this entire continent, people are merely considered to be the property of their domain's lord. This was considered to be common sense here, but I disagree with it. Meaning, a rental fee could be earned by loaning out the "property," it had to be concealed in this flashy manner, and nobody would blame my father.

Since anti-slavery laws are strong in the Arxia Kingdom, openly practicing slavery would mean getting exiled. Although Earl Terejia seems to have a strong sense of ethics, there's probably corrupt nobles in other parts of Arxia.

Because this country has enjoyed a long period of peace, I wonder if that's caused Arxia to stagnate and begin to rot from inside. Unfortunately, I found out that "laborers" were dispatched to countless houses. And, even now there are still many laborers.

These laborers are an example of the numerous despotic laws that my father enacted like vomit. It's terrible. "Laborers" that returned from after pregnancy would be abused even more,

increasing even further the amount of psychological damage dealt to them.

Since they were under an unbearably high tax, many commoners were in the harsh situation of facing starvation, and there were so many famished people that improving the quality of life within my domain was slow progress.

That's why I'm saying, things are better already. Earl Terejia had put the safety of my domain's people as his first priority.

He started with the hunger issue. He sold off all the senselessly expensive stuff in the house. That's good. I wouldn't even know where to sell all these things. That money was used to provide free meals to the people.

At the same time as distributing food to the villages, he also promised forgiveness to the villagers that had been forced into banditry by the terrible conditions. At this time I didn't know it yet but, Earl Terejia seems to have purchased food and supplies from out of his own pocket as well. But, he calculated it as a loan to Viscountess Kaldia in my name, is what I found out later.

Next, he captured all the wrongdoers that benefitted from working together with my father. Since most of the Kaldia family had been assassinated in a single day, they had all fled. I learned this after I started associating with other nobles. The reason being, they had taken what valuables they could with them when they had fled. After executing the primary conspirators responsible and distributing their wealth, along with addressing the hunger issue, the people's resentment towards Earl Terejia and me was able to take a 180 degree turn and view us in a much better light.

After that, it's just a matter of improving our popularity with the people in my domain. It's a good thing that the people were so weak that they weren't even able to consider revolt.

Their bodies and minds had been completely in tatters, after all.

And so, for the past two years Earl Terejia has worked tirelessly day and night for the sake of my domain. Looking at the golden sight outside my window, I cried a little at the knowledge.

Earl Terejia is rather elderly. Rather, it can be said that he's quite a bit older than the life expectancy in this country. It's due to the standard of living. It's not strange at all for anyone seven and older to die of something, and reaching seventy was about the limit. I could only watch such an elderly noble become more and more haggard with his work, while I was being taken care of by the nanny he prepared for me, Mrs. Galton.

In fact, I've still never even spoken with him. At first, it was simply because Earl Terejia was very busy. The situation was that the people in my domain had to be managed and helped as quickly as possible. There was no time for stopping, his work arrived for him like angry waves crashing down. Earl Terejia himself had no time to spare to take care of children. And I was fine with that. I had no reason to complain.

It happened that night.

I was leaning out the window, looking at the clear, bright night sky and its sparkling stars with nary a cloud in sight. I didn't really mean anything by it. It's just that when I was looking outside earlier, I happened to want to see the stars later for some reason.

"Do you want to go out, Eliza?"

A low, hoarse voice that still had a bit of power to it came from beside me. I think I could liken it to rumbling thunder. Before I realized it, he had put his hand on my back and I felt a nervous feeling in my stomach, and my body was stiff with

tension. I don't know what the reason could be for him suddenly speaking to me is, since he's never even said "hello" to me in the two years since he's been here.

"……Why did you think something like that?'

Although I knew it was rude to answer a question with a question, but the earl didn't seem to mind, and looked at the stars that I had just been looking at.

"Earlier during the day, I heard that you had been crying to go out."

"Eh?"

"I had been wondering if you were lamenting your misfortune at being unable to go out, but it seems that I was mistaken. Yet, child, why is it that when you have never even cried before today, that you would cry over something trivial that happened when you have such a lovely personality?"

Mrs. Galton must have reported it to him, I see. While looking at the wheat shining brilliantly in the sun earlier today, I was indeed crying. My nanny must have seen me earlier today since she had been taking care of me for the last two years, and I'm like a daughter to her now. Oh, and, I suppose three and four year olds should have been crying more, eh. Since I'm able to speak, I also didn't have anything to cry over or complain about, I've finally realized belatedly that it may have seemed a little strange.

"Indeed, as far as I can remember, I've never left this house. However, I understand already that it's out of necessity. I don't have any special interest in going outside or anything like that."

"……"

"Today…… I was just looking at the wheat fields outside. It wasn't that I wanted to go out."

The earl who had been silently looking at the stars without speaking, suddenly returned his gaze to me. He was looking me straight in the eye, but I didn't know what he was thinking.

"The wheat is finally ripe, now. When I thought about that, I involuntarily started crying for some reason."

And with that, the earl and I stared at each other in silence. His black pupils were still filled with a strong light in them, but I was still unable to tell what he was thinking at all. The eyes are supposed to be windows to the soul is what I suddenly recalled, so I started thinking about phrases from the previous world. If you gaze into an abyss……

"The abyss will gaze back into you."

"Eh?"

I was shocked at hearing something so unexpected, it happened in an instant. By then, Earl Terejia had already turned around and started leaving. Without saying anything else, the earl disappeared from my sight in the hallway.

CHAPTER 3
A MORNING OF EAVESDROPPING

It's been a few days since I turned five.

It's morning during what's left of early spring. It wasn't time for Mrs. Galton to come wake me up yet, I might have woken up because I sensed something. Something seemed to be abuzz in the mansion, I could hear the adults discussing something in low voices. I hurriedly changed from my pajamas into casual wear, and left my room as softly as possible. The hallway was still a bit dim and chilly.

In this country..... or rather, this area, the most common casual wear is tunics and dalmatics, they're a bit too needlessly heavy for me. It's such a pain to carry the hems so that they don't make a sound against the ground.

Originally, I'm supposed to stay in my room obediently until Mrs. Galton comes to get me, but today it seems like something is afoot. It should be fine if I just see what's going on without being a bother to anyone.

This mansion is called the Mansion of Golden Hills, but given the Kaldia family's former predilection towards wild extravagance, it actually seems a little small in comparison. The name comes from the wheat fields under direct control of the family surrounding the mansion. In this domain, the areas under direct control primarily harvest high-priced wheat, while commoners mainly have to raise rye for themselves. But three years ago, these wheat fields had been a blighted wasteland due to a plague.

It seems that in Arxia, the residence of a lord of the domain is usually on the scale of a small castle, but since the Kaldia family's domain has been small and poor for several

generations, they couldn't afford to build something like a castle. And as for why my father never even maintained the place at all..... He was afraid of attracting attention with flashy reconstruction. His hobby instead was to expand the dungeons as much as possible, really, he was the lowest of the low. He didn't even consider that his own actions caused the people to resent him, leading to a loop where he would imprison more and more people. Because of this, the Mansion of Golden Hills was considered to be one of the smallest noble residences, split up so that the second and third floors had various bedrooms and empty rooms, and the first floor had rooms such as the drawing room and kitchen. My bedroom was located in basically the innermost part of the second floor, and even though the floor was decently thick, I could still hear a commotion from downstairs all the way from the second floor, so in order not to be caught, I quietly moved until the sounds grew louder and I reached the staircase. After all, it's been the first time ever since I killed my family that there's been such a large commotion.

Hiding myself in the shadows of the pillars, I peeked from the staircase railings over towards the entrance. Both entrance doors were wide open, and several busy-seeming adults were bustling about repeatedly. They seemed to mostly consist of fully armed men, and the ones that were all wearing leather with no sense of uniformity, they were probably Viscount Kaldia's personal troops. The soldiers that were wearing metal armor, were probably prepared by Earl Terejia for some reason, or maybe even sent here by the House of Lords for some purpose.....

Given that soldiers from other territories generally wore chainmail, it feels like the technological level of my domain might be almost one hundred years behind the other domains. Because of the House of Lords, the nobles aren't totally isolated from each other, so a certain level of standard has been

achieved across Arxia, making my domain's soldiers stand out as rather unusual. Once again, this is just appalling.

Currently, this mansion is inhabited by eleven people, including me and Earl Terejia. My nanny, Mrs. Galton, my governess, Mrs. Marshan, the earl's secretary, Bellway, the cook Nathan and the baker Olga, the maids Isadora and Phoebe, the gardener Boriswaf, and the maidservant Mary.

The people that were usually still sleeping at this time were only me, Mrs. Galton, and Mrs. Marshan, while everyone else would have started working already. Anyways, I could hear someone's angry voice without any hesitation to it coming from the drawing room. Even though I wanted to know what was going on and even sneaked out of my room to here, no matter how much I concentrated I couldn't make out what was being said.

I wonder if it's better to give up and go back to my room. It's probably almost time for Mrs. Galton to come to my room in order to wake me up. The thin clouds outside the window were beginning to let a few rays of sunshine through the dimness.

Thinking while running my hand through my hair, I slowly began to return. Just at this moment, someone ran to the drawing room.

Maybe he didn't close the door because he was in such a hurry, or maybe he just felt it wasn't necessary. Now that the door to the drawing room was no longer closed, I could suddenly hear a sonorous voice loud and clearly from where I was.

"Here's my report. Agil Irishettsu, stationed at Shiriru village, is reporting that the wolf dragon draconis has been discovered."

– Draconis? At the term that sounded out of place, I involuntarily stepped forward a bit. It's a name I've only heard

in fairy tales here, so I was rather tense about this. The strange name caught my full attention and piqued my curiosity, and I completely forgot about returning to my room.

In one of my bedtime stories that Mrs. Galton had read to me, there were a few of them that could be counted as heroic epics. Something that didn't change from world to world, was the fact that morality plays where monsters were exterminated were always popular. For example, the tale where the Ar Xia church's shrine maiden, Xia Fema's servant Wetzlar defeated the giant evil wolf dragon and rescued his wife and daughter is famous throughout all of Arxia. Really, this is closer to a myth than a fairy tale, but……

There's also other stories like how the monkey sage and the ancient wolf dragon have lived for thousands of years, but this is just another commonly told fairy tale.

According to it, draconis is a gigantic wolf with scales, with a snake's tail, and wings on its back like a bat's that allow it to fly.

I had thought it was only a fusion of several beasts made from imagination, but it seems that wasn't the case.

The draconis actually exists. Come to think of it, this world isn't only a separate world entirely, I finally remembered that this is also a fantasy world. If I think back really hard on the game's information, the word "monster" did seem to appear several times in it.

Of course, in the ordinary Amon Nor Mountains, it was said that in the farthest innermost portion of the Bandishia Plateau, they lived and ate the snow snakes there, but since I'd never seen such a thing for myself, I didn't believe it up until now.

"Anyways, something like the draconis suddenly appearing. Exactly what is going on?"

"……Somehow it happened."

Since I slipped out from my room and heard about the draconis, Mrs. Galton had a strange look on her face but I somehow came up with a good excuse although I was rather ambiguous and vague. After all, surely I couldn't tell her the truth about slipping out and what I just heard.

Even in the afternoon, the commotion in the mansion still hadn't died down. It didn't seem like Earl Terejia was trying to hide the information on the draconis from me. He did seem to tell Mrs. Galton to not let me loiter around too close to the drawing room, but I stayed in the dining hall next to the drawing room and could still hear everything being said just fine.

The discovered draconis was quite large. According to the stories I heard before, draconis were supposed to be rather similar to wolves, preferring to live in herds. That's why the draconis from this village was being called a lone wolf.

I wondered what exactly the draconis had come down especially for from the Amon Nor Mountains, to the place where humans lived. Since the mountains weren't a fitting location for a domain there, there really should be no reason. Since they're saying it's such a large individual, I doubt it would have lost in some territory war amongst its own kind up there either.

"Eliza-sama, it's time for your meal now!"

"……Pardon me."

There was too much to think about so I had lost sight of my surroundings while I concentrated. After a sharp rebuke from Mrs. Galton at neglecting my meal, I hurriedly stopped thinking about the draconis for the time being.

CHAPTER 3.5
MEMORIES FROM DREAMS WITHIN DREAMS
PART ONE

I was alone in a lurid, hollow, dismal, yet beautiful world. I vaguely wondered if I was dreaming. While floating up and down, I merely looked at something that seemed like bubbles.

Is it alright to call these my memories, I wonder. No, these don't exist in my current life.

Is it alright to call these recordings, I wonder. No, I can't touch or feel anything.

The colorless bubbles became smells, sounds, images, I could feel something against my skin, and could taste things at times too. Although it was nostalgic, I also felt a sense of emptiness inside as well. It was as if I was forced to pick up a book I'd already read before, and forced into reading it again.

This isn't me. While I was confident of this, the knowledge contained within were things only I knew. Meaning, at the same time, this is undoubtedly also me.

How should I call this. – I think its term is my ordinary, banal previous life.

I was born and raised as a regular girl with regular parents and a younger sister in a much different world where civilization was highly developed. Other than the fact that I died rather young, there was nothing special about me at all. I didn't have any hobbies or passions like my younger sister, I was moderately cool about everything, a person lacking in personality.

And the thing is, the girl that I used to be gave off the impression that she had no interest in anyone or anything around her.

Among that girl's colorless memory bubbles, only vivid images appeared. Meaning, recent memories from right before she died. As I looked at her life, I felt like I was treading water, it was distant and dull to me, as I was forced to relive these memories I'd already gone through.

Of course, since that girl is now a different existence from me, although I understand her way of thinking, I'm no longer the exact same wavelength as her. Another way of saying it, it felt more like a sense of intimacy just like towards my mother and younger sister.

"Lately, I've been getting so tired from everything....."

The girl's voice sounded muddy and weak. Before she died, she had kept thinking that. Running would make her instantly tired, I wonder if it's because she never participated in any school activities. Also, even climbing the stairs would make her have shortness of breath. I think it's because she really lacked physical strength.

Come to think of it, I remembered about that girl at this point in time. Lately, she would only use elevators and escalators, to decrease the amount of walking she would have to do. Whenever she left her house, she would ride a car or take a train, she never even walked one kilometer from her house.

As this memory bubble disappeared, another one replaced it.

"Something seems off. I'm this lacking in physical fitness?"

Before she realized it, the girl had begun burning out. She had difficulties getting to sleep every night due to her

breathlessness, and she would often get dizzy.

There was also terrible edema on her hands, feet, and face, I wonder if it's because of lack of sleep?

As her physical condition got worse and worse, and after she fainted more than five times, she was withdrawn from school for medical reasons and simply rested at home, and thoroughly managed her own lifestyle. Like a machine, she would get up every day at a predetermined time, take a calculated diet, and get a moderate amount of exercise.

However, her situation didn't improve. On the contrary, she even began feeling pains in her chest.

Then one night, she convulsed in her death throes, and died.

The memory bubbles felt like they were distorting my body. The girl's experience and suffering dully wrapped around my body, and felt like it was trying to crush me, but I somehow managed to withstand it and moved on to the next memory bubble.

The girl had very few clear opinions on anything. It wasn't limited to only difficult subjects, for example she couldn't even say what her favorite foods were, or give an opinion on whether it was right or wrong to eat the more intelligent animals.

In contrast, the girl's younger sister was a person that clearly expressed her opinions on everything, and made her like or dislike of things clear rather than remaining ambiguous.

Her younger sister had felt dissatisfaction with the older sister's weak will, and conversely the girl wasn't able to understand how her younger sister had the ability to clearly speak her thoughts on everything.

As if to show everything more clearly, the bubble had mostly disappeared and become a blur. The next memory bubble

appeared.

“Your physical condition doesn’t seem to be so great lately. Are you alright?”

The third time that I fainted in the classroom during lecture, the teacher finally had a one-on-one discussion with me. The teacher was shocked at the girl’s badly swollen face, and encouraged her to get a checkup at the hospital. As suggested, the girl got tested at the internal medicine department, but there was no clear result, and the only conclusion was that she should review and revise her lifestyle.

Although she tried to do what she could for her irregular school life, the changes in the girl’s body continued.

The colorless memory bubble faded. As I watched the memories, it felt like my heart was gradually drying up. Without paying any attention to that, the next memory appeared, and I was reluctantly forced to accept it.

After the girl began staying home from school and was planning out her daily life, her parents suggested that she take up a hobby for fun. Indeed, the girl’s original plans had been a bit too mechanical.

However, she couldn’t think of anything she wanted to do for fun at all. She had basically no interests at all. Normally she just watched TV or surfed the internet, or read manga that she would borrow from friends, or flip through magazines, she would just pass the time meaninglessly.

“Hey, why don’t you try this game that’s being featured right now?”

Maybe she couldn’t bear to see the state the girl was in, one day the girl’s younger sister made a suggestion.

At this memory, I got goosebumps all over my body. For some reason, I really didn’t want to see this memory only. I

got a really bad feeling.

The moment I thought so, I escaped with a strong momentum. The colorless bubbles, the lurid colors, everything was rapidly fading.

But even so, I didn’t wake up from my dream. While still sleeping lightly and feeling like everything was so far from me, I looked back at my previous world again.

CHAPTER 3.5
MEMORIES FROM DREAMS WITHIN DREAMS
PART TWO

I fell down into the muddy world of sleep. In the darkness, beautiful yet lurid colors were overlapping. If this is a visualization of my own spirit, even I feel that it's quite bleak. I'm not quite able to describe it accurately with words, but it was a twisted sight, that seemed terribly hollow to me.

Even though I was so immersed in my dream world, strangely my mind still retained quite a sharp sense for emotion. It feels like while I'm asleep, my heart is shriveling.

Memory bubbles appeared again out of somewhere, they were wriggling. What will I see this time, I wonder. At any rate, I had no way of resisting, so I'll just quietly watch them obediently.

They were some pretty old memories. It happened when I had been just a little older than I am now.

In front of the young girl that used to be me, was her younger sister that was scratching in pain at herself due to the effect of some plant. The girl was watching the sight in horror.

The girl's younger sister had been playing at a shallow river. Her whole family was out that day on a picnic. Her parents noticed that her younger sister was violently thrashing about in the river, and came running over. My father forced my younger sister to throw up by sticking a finger down her mouth, while my mother called an ambulance.

Her younger sister had accidentally swallowed some leaves of

the hemlock growing by the water's edge. It seems that some of the leaves had fallen into the water, so she swallowed them along with the river water.

It's an extremely clear memory. Even though my memories had begun fading after I reincarnated, this is one of the clearest memories that I can recall. I had used this memory to kill my entire family.

Even just a few tiny leaves had almost killed my younger sister. When I had shredded maybe hundreds of the leaves into the soup, it was a memory that remained carved into my mind even up to now.

Without paying attention to my feelings, the memories kept changing on me to new scenes.

"Oh? ……So there was this type of game as well."

The girl was holding a video game controller pointed at a TV screen. The 3D CG character looked pretty good on the screen, and places that seemed like western palaces were beautifully displayed on the screen as well. In front of all this scenery, was the girl that was the heroine of this game.

"- If you take this path and turn right, the crown prince should be there."

Next to the girl, her younger sister was giving her information on the game's capture targets. Even though the girl really didn't care for spoilers about characters and story that she hadn't seen yet, her younger sister kept blabbing on.

Maybe it was that she sensed that her older sister was approaching death, and that she wanted to have more conversation time together.

"If you listen to the crown prince, you'll also learn about the military commander-in-chief's grandson. But, you won't be able to go down the crown prince path then."

On the screen was a young boy with blonde hair. It seems that he's the crown prince.

The screen darkened as some conversation choices popped up, while an image of the crown prince remained on the left side. It seems that there's different screens for when the characters are conversing with each other.

"Hey, Emilia Rindarl. What's up?"

Although the lines had voice acting, the voice actor acting the part sounded a bit unnatural. The girl furrowed her eyebrows as she went to the options menu, and turned the voice acting to the OFF option.

"Ah, wait."

The girl ignored her younger sister's objection. The tone of the male voice had sounded a bit too flirtatious, and the girl felt uncomfortable at that.

This is quite a long memory. Even though I didn't want to see it, the memory continued on. Still, I couldn't avert my gaze. Even if I tried to pay no attention to it, I wouldn't be able to pretend to forget about it immediately. My heart was pounding.

Even though I didn't want to see it and tried to resist, I couldn't move even a finger. Even though I'm feeling distressed, this time I wasn't able to escape.

The game's BGM suddenly changed, to a much more aggressive soundtrack. A girl in a gaudy dress with black hair and sharp eyes appeared. She had a much different type of design from any character that had appeared so far.

"Ah, it's Eliza."

The girl's younger sister suddenly muttered that, and the girl learned that Eliza was the heroine's rival and enemy.

There was a noise ringing in my head. The fog was already fading from my head, and I just kept staring at the remnants of this piece of memory in my mind.

I can't say that the person on the screen merely looked like me. After all, the person on the screen really had been "me."

The moment she appeared, it was made clear that she was the heroine Emilia's enemy. She's always dressed in vulgar and gaudy clothing, and has a twisted, evil personality. She would feign politeness while getting in the way of the relationship between the crown prince and the daughter of the archduke from the neighboring country.

That was the type of character that Eliza Kaldia was.

CHAPTER 4
THE BABY DRACONIS

My days where I still couldn't go beyond the mansion or the garden continued as always with my schedule remaining the same each day.

In the mornings, Mrs. Galton would come wake me up, help me get dressed then perform morning worship, then head to breakfast together in the dining hall. Mrs. Marshan would then teach me various subjects until noon, have a snack, then exercise in the garden if it's sunny, or read if the weather is bad, then wash myself with hot water before having dinner, and then finally perform an evening prayer as well before sleeping.

Because as a noble girl, my life was controlled and scheduled very tightly by my nanny, I basically had no free time.

After the commotion caused by the draconis, the mansion eventually returned to life as usual. Mrs. Galton and I went on with our lives as usual while all the adults hurriedly bustled around, that is to say the event wasn't able to change our daily routine. Earl Terejia was also directly passing me educational materials on culture and moral sense.

One day early in the second month of the year, the mansion returned to being silent for once again. The adults that had made the mansion noisy every day might have captured the draconis, or maybe they've left for the extermination now.

I received Mrs. Marshan's lessons as if nothing had ever happened, and just like usual the three of us were eating together. Suddenly, there was a disturbance at the entrance, and the door to the dining hall opened. And then Earl Terejia came in, and even bothered to tell me personally to come to

the garden to talk to him after I was finished eating.

At first, I was wondering exactly what it could be.

While I'm surprised that the earl had something to say to me, even more surprising was that the earl personally came over to inform me rather than having someone else do it for him.

Ever since our first conversation that one night last year, I've had several chances to speak with him directly, but he would always wave me off with one hand. Because of that, I wondered if an emergency had occurred and packed a snack in a hurry.

Even though I knew it was a breach of etiquette, I ran towards the garden.

The thing in question he wanted to talk to me about, was about raising a baby draconis, it turned out to be something I completely didn't expect.

It seems that the draconis that appeared in my domain earlier had been a female individual looking for a place to give birth. The male was nowhere to be found, and judging from the fact that the female's body was full of injuries, it seems that the conclusion was it had indeed lost in a territorial war and been chased down the mountain. The earl and his party had discovered the draconis's nesting spot when they headed out to protect the village in question, but the draconis in question seems to have passed away while giving birth, leaving behind four baby draconis.

Since the draconis is an extremely intelligent monster, if they are trained before they mature and get used to people, it seems that they can be tamed.

There's been no actual examples of this for the past two hundred years, but since it seems to have occurred once before, the story has been passed down. Because of my father, my domain used to have the worst public order in the land, in

order to keep the peace, Earl Terejia had moved his personal forces here as well, and it seems that even if people did poorly in training the punishment would be light. From the kingdom east of the Kaldia domain, there was a forest filled with monsters, and snow snakes would often come down from the nearby Amon Nor Mountains as well, so it wasn't uncommon that there would sometimes be losses to some livestock. Since the draconis's main prey was snow snakes, Earl Terejia decided to see if a draconis could be successfully raised to be used for the sake of my domain. I had no objections.

Out of the four baby draconis, three had been sent over to the fortress along our eastern border with the neighboring country, Fort Jugfena. The last one was being held in Earl Terejia's waist, and it was sucking on dog milk that had been soaked in a cotton cloth. Seeing the earl and his rugged face taking care of the draconis as if it were a puppy was quite a surreal sight to behold, I was completely lost for words when I had ran out to and arrived at the garden.

Without minding the fact that I had a blank look on my face with my mouth wide agape, the earl simply explained what had happened, and he told me quite frankly why he had called me over.

"Eliza, you're going to be this draconis's master. Take care of it properly every day, in order to get it used to you."

"I understand."

During my conversation with the earl, I only had about two seconds of time to be confused about it all. Since he had just explained the situation to me, my reply was immediate. My head which wasn't working quite yet decided on its own to agree for me, it's probably better evidence than anything of the training I've received as a noble girl.

With the aid of Mrs. Marshan who had quite a wide breadth

of common sense and knowledge, I decided to give my astonishingly rare pet the name of Rashiok. It's the name of the ancient sun god that was worshiped here in the Jugfena region. It's now just an obscure fairy tale, in which the sun in the story claimed this name as its own. Once, a mouse took a bite out of Rashiok's cheese sun, but the weakened sun will still help people in their time of need, is what I remembered Mrs. Galton saying before.

Mrs. Galton had been born somewhere in the south southwest of Arxia, I figured it would have been around the Greenfield region, but she really knows the Jugfena region's fairy tales quite well..... Well, because Mrs. Galton has quite a serious personality, she might have specially looked into the fairy tales here in order to adapt better to this region and show her commitment.

Rashiok was a baby draconis that had just been born.

Three months later after all the commotion from his arrival, Rashiok finally became able to open his thin eyelids. He would nudge me with his tiny nose whenever he wanted milk, and press against the cotton wool filled with milk with small, awkward movements, and whenever he saw something he would first point his not at all dangerous seeming nose towards it, it seems that the soldier in training Kamil who shared some of the responsibilities for raising him with me felt some regret towards this last part.

"Even though he seems so cute....."

"Will he still be like that even after he grows up?"

"Everything is cute when they're small, Charlie. Even though Charlie is a chibi, you don't understand the cuteness of small things, you must have lacked something while you were growing up....."

For some reason that I don't understand, Kamil would always

call me Charlie. I am a respectable noble with the title of viscount after all, so I tried to get the reason out of him, but he still wouldn't tell me. Really, what a rude fellow. I'll forgive any irreverence wherever there's nobody else around, but it might have been a mistake to say that to him in the first place. Since he was to be my partner in this and I would be seeing his face every day, I thought it would be too bothersome if he was always respectful towards me and obeyed orders, but this……

"Because young ones are able to obtain the love of those around them while they're still small, it means that it's just a type of defense mechanism."

"Charlie's not cute at all when you say things like that."

And so Kamil shook his head and sighed, seeming to lament something, when I heard the whistling sound of the maidservant Mary from the corridor to the garden. Since she was interested in our conversations, she would often listen in from time to time and laugh in amusement. I wonder if I should wish for a change of pace or some rest from this daily work I do. I don't really mind being listened in on that much, but from time to time I'd like to listen in on something interesting as well.

"If it's just like that children's song, I think that Rashiok might be able to move around by himself by the next full moon."

"A draconis that was just born, will open its eyes during the night, and will run about and play during the evening, and will leave its nest during the night after three months. Counting the moons since Rashiok's been born, and the way he's been opening his eyes, it seems that everything in the song was correct after all."

"There's always been a legend around here of a draconis being a loyal guardian once, it unexpectedly turned out to be true."

As Kamil got lost in his interest towards the draconis, I looked straight into Rashiok's golden pupils. In another ten days, this tiny creature will be able to move around on its own……

To me, who had just been a baby, feeling like a pet to other humans while my destiny remained far away from me, I had fun watching his growth every day, because he didn't have sight while young he seemed so cute and yet so lonely. I definitely won't mistreat him, and my feelings just happened to match up with Kamil's on this matter.

CHAPTER 5
THIS IS BASIC TRAINING

"Don't leave your side open!"

In tandem with the unforgiving angry voice, my wooden sword was knocked out of my hands. My sparring partner Gunther, would not go easy on me at all. While holding my wrist which was numb from the shock still, I thanked him politely.

Rashiok has grown to the point where it's fine even if I'm not watching him at all times anymore, it's now late summer. The barracks being built for the domain's troops next to the Mansion of Golden Hills has been completed, Earl Terejia had organized the troops he had hired along with the original soldiers from my domain here. It's quite some building they've finished here..... It feels like just not long ago I was still watching its construction from my window.

Right after the troops moved into the barracks, for some reason the earl had me start learning martial arts. In order to drill the foundations of how to use the sword and spear into me, a three month soldier in training course (for a noble) has been prepared especially for me.

But really, I'm supposed to be a girl. I'm wondering if Earl Terejia has perhaps happened to forget my gender.

It's probably a standard part of noble education so there's nothing strange about this. There's no problem with this, but..... A different problem is that I feel like my life may be in danger now.

After I thought about it for a bit, I decided to do it.

This barracks was decided upon in order to allow the Kaldia

domain's troops to stay here at all times. Since it's the Kaldia domain's troops, of course they were mostly my domain's people. Meaning, among them were still people that hated my father's blood to the point of wanting to boil him alive. Of course, they would include me in their targets to hate as well. They hate me simply because of my heritage..... Those kinds of uncouth fellows.

I went out from the mansion for the first time. For grave crimes, the place where you would get quartered became my first memory of a place I visited outside the mansion, so I wondered if there was such a thing as karma, just how bad my karma would be currently.

Something even worse, is that more than half of my domain's troops were originally bandits. I wonder if I'll really make it to the end of my three month training alive.

At least Kamil and Rashiok are with me as well as my caretaker and pet but, if I'm spoiled too much by Kamil it'll probably cause my head to be separated from my body soon down the road, so I hurriedly dragged out my skills for self sufficiency from my previous life that I had almost forgotten by now after reincarnating.

"March ten laps around here, and don't you dare slack off!"

"Yes!"

"Do you remember how many times I've said it already, use your voice from the stomach when you reply!"

"Yes! I'm sorry!"

The jeers finally stopped after a while, well it could be worse.

I had always been confined to a gilded cage and raised delicately until now, but this training to me caused me to throw up every night and become completely covered in sweat and sand and mud, although it's difficult to describe

completely with just words.

Although my breakfast and light meal for lunch were properly prepared for me by the troops, at night I was supposed to provide for myself. It seems to be common training for improving survival ability while on the battleground.

Night in the Kaldia domain is long for lower-ranked soldiers that don't even get candles. Since I'm also throwing up my food during training, at night my hunger would never, never end, but because my own weakness is the cause, I desperately searched for anything edible at all that I could gather. In my previous life I never wanted for food, and in this life I was born and raised in a noble family that didn't lack resources either, so I've never known until now just how painful an empty stomach could be.

It was good that Rashiok was allowed to help me, since searching for edible food with a five year old's abilities was a bit beyond me. Rashiok was beginning to grow scales, and was the size of a small dog, and would roll around and enjoy our hunt for food. After I returned to the barracks, the "food" I collected would be checked for edibility, an actual soldier in training would have to check for poisons themselves, so it seems I was given preferential treatment in this.

Of course, I was at least properly taught about the poisons that could cause immediate death.

Although my stomach feels like it's breaking every night, and even blowing bubbles at me could topple me over, at least it's still been calm and quiet every time I visit the barracks.

For a powerful country with no wars, it feels like they have an almost strange level of importance attached to the training about food. I wonder if it's a relic from the time when they became bandits because of a lack of food..... How dare them,

something must be wrong with their heads. Is it that people's spirits have become soft after developing civilization, or that they made this training for me because something's wrong with them, I wonder which it is.

Because there were many types of poisonous mushrooms, that was the first lesson hammered into my body.

Birds and rabbits are commonly eaten by the people in my domain, but no matter how many times I tried to hunt them with Rashiok, we were unable to catch even one.

There were only frogs with very little to eat on them, I learned that the bigger ones would be under the mud. Their eggs are supposed to be edible, but unfortunately it's not the season for that right now.

The snakes that I could find were all rather large, and I was treated to a snow snake recently. Since they're the main prey for the draconis, its nutritional value must be high.

Most spiders, even the poisonous ones, can be edible when cooked.

Since many herbs are very poisonous and bad for digestion, eating them will be only a last, last resort.

I collected a lot of fruits from various trees, but most were indigestible. Since they would come up again when I threw up exactly the same as when they went in my stomach, I quickly gave up eating these.

What was easiest for me to capture was lizards. The drawback is that lizards must be cooked very well done over a fire in order to prevent parasites, but well, I'm learning now with my own body that humans are truly omnivorous.

Since my hunting results haven't been very good the past few days, the day before yesterday I tried boiling grass in salt water, and yesterday I found an out of season cicada, and tried

some of the weeds growing all over the place. It turns out that young pampas grass is actually edible, who would have thought……

“Charlie hasn’t been to the river yet, eh. There’s always many insects, snakes, and plants there, and if you try hard you might even be able to fish something too.”

“That this grubby brat is actually supposed to be a refined noble, ten out of ten people probably wouldn’t believe it.”

All the soldiers in training are calling me Charlie. Kamil must have spread it without me knowing, or maybe it’s an old name for something in this region. I have no idea whatsoever if it’s supposed to be derogatory or affectionate. I wonder if they’re taking it out on me because I’m a noble girl and they hate the aristocracy, or if they’re getting along well with me since we’re all comrades that are in this together, sharing similar meals.

Some days their attitudes would be as cold as ice, and some days they would be warm towards me as if I were their own child. Human emotions and feelings are so complicated that I don’t understand them even now.

“The river, huh…… Charlie, I think you know this already, but if you go there take Kamil with you.”

“That’s right. Otherwise you might get lost, and can’t find your way back, you’ll be crying!”

The men were all treating me as a child with their language, and the soldiers in training were getting each other riled up with their playful banter. Well, it’s a fact that I’m technically still a child, so I just nodded without minding what they said, and just like always, the charm of a lovable child, which these fellows completely lacked, was able to cause most of these guys to fall silent in amazement.

I don’t mean to blame anyone but, even though I’ve adapted to life in the barracks, I still haven’t gone out from the land

under direct control even once. The land under direct control also included a small patch of woods and a pond. I haven't gone out far enough to the point where the barracks and mansion would no longer be visible, since I had felt that it would be better to stay within vision of adults I could reach just in case some sort of trouble happened.

"Oh, isn't it about time for the kid to go to sleep? You're going to be beaten up by Gunther again early in the morning, you know?"

The oldest soldier in training among the lot, who usually didn't speak up very much, raised his voice, and caused a bout of laughter. After breakfast every day, it was time for everyone to help out in the fields belonging to the area under direct control, other than me who would be useless even if I went to the fields, so I would receive swordsmanship instruction from Gunther, and my sword would be knocked out of my hands dozens of times, and after that I would be receiving training in martial arts and getting beaten up but not to a terrible extent, this has become the usual pattern.

Since I was getting worn out and pushed to the limits by Gunther every day, I could feel the other soldiers becoming slightly less reserved with me. After seeing their enemy's daughter getting beaten up and rolled around in the dirt so much, it's probably a load off their chests.

"That's right. I'll go to sleep now, good night everyone."

I bid them good night politely, then slipped into my bed of straw. The instant I laid down, I could feel my consciousness slipping away from me and I fell asleep immediately.

CHAPTER 6
CONCERN ABOUT THE NEIGHBORING COUNTRY

The stunningly golden wheat, and all the rye as well has been harvested, a silent winter was about to take over from late autumn here in the Kaldia domain. My three month soldier in training course was almost over, and I'm also throwing up much less often than before. Every day, I would walk around with a hoe for plowing that was taller than I was, but for now, it was too big for me to even swing. It's some sort of strange training that's supposed to improve my physical strength and endurance.

It happened one day right before I would return to my life in the mansion from the barracks. In the office of the domain's lord in the Mansion of Golden Hills that I wasn't allowed to step into until I completed my training course, right now I was receiving a personal lesson from Earl Terejia in front of four maps on the national situation.

Earl Terejia has reformed the domain's laws quite a bit, and in particular he wrote all of the laws pertaining to the domain's troops himself. Before he came, it was like we almost didn't even have a standing army. It's because in my father's entourage, as long as about ten people had weapons, that was enough for him to swagger about.

After all, it's stipulated that all the nobles in Arxia are supposed to have their own forces. Of course, basically no countries would want to invade Arxia, the largest country on the continent, and inside the country it's been peaceful as well ever since the kingdom was founded, many lords' armies were there in name only. It's no exaggeration to say that the only

ones with decent armies are the earls stationed on the remote borders.

In the time of the Arxia Kingdom's previous incarnation, the Ar Xia Holy Kingdom, we had already abandoned all policies of military aggression towards other countries. Currently, the borders with other countries were closed, and only those with a passport issued by the king were allowed to enter or leave.

We have non-interference peace treaties with other countries, and there are friendly trade agreements to allow merchants with permission from the state to do business and international trade. Our country basically practices isolationism.

As for the overall situation in the continent, the rise and fall of nations occurs very often with high intensity. The countries apart from the Arxia Kingdom are basically always on alert and vigilant for war.

Arxia Kingdom is able to remain at peace largely in part because the other countries haven't been able to develop beyond anything more than small countries. The power struggles between countries of similar strengths is keeping them busy, so none of them have the time to even do anything about the major power Arxia.

Among all this, as for why Earl Terejia has been raising an army in the Kaldia domain, of course there's a reason for it. It's to guard against the countries in the east.

"The Rindarl Union Dukedom, is it?"

"They might be changing their name to Rindarl Empire soon."

To the east of the Arxia Kingdom, four countries have been expanding their territory for the past hundred years. It's an alliance between the countries of Densel, Planates, Giograd, and Parmigran.

Originally, there had been a country called the Rindarl Kingdom that ruled over the northeastern part of this continent, but it split into north, south, east, and west, each ruled over by a duke, and each dukedom ended up attracting many people similar to the duke of each country, thus becoming their own separate countries with individualistic traits.

Some time recently, there had been a movement to reunify the four dukedoms and to nominate an archduke as the leader of the four dukedoms. With that many people under their rule combined, it wouldn't be strange if they changed their name to the Rindarl Empire.

Right now, the four dukedoms are small countries compared with Arxia, but if they combine and become one country then they will become a great power comparable to Arxia. If another country with similar power is born, then the predominant position that Arxia has held onto for so long might be no more. Depending on the actions from the Rindarl side, a war between the two countries may very well be possible.

"Between the Kaldia domain and the country of Densel, there's only the Jugfena royal domain. If a battle with Rindarl begins, not only would you be ordered to the front lines, it wouldn't matter even if you had no combat skills."

Earl Terejia explained everything clearly and in extreme detail to me, while he marked places for me on the maps showing the northern part of the continent and the Arxia Kingdom.

With Rindarl uniting together, that would completely change the power balance in the north. Arxia would be affected the most directly, which is why secretly, the Kaldia domain would have to take heed and be on guard as we were located in the east of Arxia and close to the border.

Because I still hadn't learned much yet from Mrs. Marshan on Arxia's politics, Earl Terejia had to explain everything to me in great detail. Even though I had arrived at the office during the morning, it was already time to have a light lunch after the earl finally arrived at the main topic.

"What I just told you about Rindarl, you should think on it a bit yourself as well. At least, right after your upcoming sixth birthday celebrations are over. It's good to be prepared early."

Earl Terejia moved onto the main issue. First, he picked up a detailed map of the north, pointing out the borders of the Jugfena royal domain and the Densel Dukedom.

"Do you know about Fort Jugfena that's been built along our national border?"

"Yes."

It's the fort where Rashiok's siblings are being raised. To the east, there's a forest known as the Monster Forest, and it's also a major export location for the grain produced by the Kaldia domain. Since it's not open ground and we have to go around the Monster Forest to get there, I've heard it would take about four days to get there on horseback.

The earl pointed his finger at the northeastern part of the royal domain. He drew a circle close to the southern tip of the Bandishia Plateau, and kept tapping it.

"Do you know about the nomads?"

"They're tribes of people that raise livestock and periodically roam. Is that correct?"

"That's mostly correct. South of the Bandishia Plateau, is a nomad tribe called the Shiru tribe. They should technically belong to the kingdom of Artolas, but because Densel has conquered Artolas, they're resisting against Densel together with some of the farmers from the border."

The earl pulled out the oldest map out of the four maps he had prepared, and showed me the area that used to be the former empire of Artolas. It's a country that used to contain the eastern half of the Amon Nor Mountains, as well as the Bandishia Plateau. Its capital Remeshu had been located in the northern plateaus, but after it fell to Densel, now it's become part of Densel's territory.

Artolas had originally been founded as a country for the Artolas people, and this included the Shiru tribe, and the farmers around the region had been accepted into the former country of Artolas as well, is what the earl explained to me.

"Since Densel now controls the farmland to the east, the Shiru tribe has been gradually moving westward. Right underneath the plateau, in the royal domain is where battle between the Shiru tribe and Densel will most likely begin. It's because that entire area is wide open plains. Actually, it's been reported to the House of Lords that the Shiru tribe and the farmers together with them would like to be accepted as refugees by Fort Jugfena."

Since the Shiru tribe has less than one in ten thousand odds of winning, if Rindarl unites together successfully then it's extremely unlikely that Densel will stand for leaving them alone. It's been five years since the name Artolas has been erased from the maps. Since the Shiru tribe has resisted Densel unsuccessfully for all this time, it's very unlikely that they'll now be accepted as citizens of Densel.

"Densel intends to wipe out the Shiru tribe, and the Shiru tribe knows that they can't resist them..... is that what's going on?"

"That's right. At this late hour, surrender is no longer an option open to them. However, although the Shiru tribe are few in number, they are excellent equestrians. It's difficult to imagine that they will be completely wiped out before they

reach Arxia."

With the fort so close to them, the Shiru tribe would definitely fight their very hardest – if that's the case, Arxia might not be able to say it's unrelated. The leaders in the Jugfena royal domain should think really hard about whether to intervene.

"The leader of a domain's armies is the lord of a domain. That means you, Eliza."

Because I've inherited the title of Viscountess as a member of the Kaldia family, that also means taking on the responsibilities that come with it. The Arxian royalty and nobility that had gotten complacent in an era of peace, didn't treat the talk of Rindarl uniting together seriously four years ago, when I had just inherited my title.

"It's fine to leave command decisions on the battlefield to General Calvin, but at a very minimum you will have to be present in the fort. If defense of the fort becomes necessary for whatever reason, know that you yourself may also be required to take up arms for self defense. After you end your time in the barracks tomorrow, I will begin teaching you how to ride a horse."

There was no room for me to agree or disagree with anything. I've always thought that the concept known as war was very far from me, but in actuality it was so close already, I looked silently into Earl Terejia's eyes, and could only respond by nodding.

CHAPTER 7
RETURNING FROM THE BARRACKS

Due to Earl Terejia's financial support, the military barracks constructed here had a large bath installed in it as well.

The bath was simple in construction, two types of water tanks were lined up against the walls, and either hot water or regular water would come down from them. The water source was the pond, benefitting me greatly, and its heat source was the kitchen stove. There was plenty of steam rising from the hot water section, so I might even be able to call it a steam bath.

For bathing, we would use a washbasin and a hand pail. Wait until the water in the hand pail is at an appropriate temperature, and then use that to wash my body with. For the sake of injured soldiers with open wounds, lavender has also been put into the water tank, as a way of disinfecting the water.

Since I used to often throw up over myself as a soldier in training, I would usually have to visit this bath twice a day.

"Today's my final farewell to this bath, eh……"

Today's the last day of my three months in the barracks. It was a long time, but it also happened in the blink of an eye. I squeezed out the water that was soaking into my bathrobe, making it heavy, in order to help calm myself down. The bathrobe's thickness was enough so that it wouldn't be transparent after it got wet, but that also made it somewhat inconvenient. But after all, I can't let myself be bathing in the buff here. I'm almost six years old and should have nothing to worry about, but this is the original me speaking. It also seems that nobles are supposed to keep up proper appearances at all times.

“If you want to do something that a viscountess should be doing, make a large bath in the village, Charlie.”

While washing my hair, I replied to Kamil’s request halfheartedly with a “I’ll consider it.” I wondered exactly how much it would cost, but since I’m not privy to the financial situation or budget of my domain now, I have no idea how to calculate it out.

“I don’t think it should be all that difficult if you base it off the bath in Pactoshiki.”

“How am I supposed to use that as a reference. On top of only you knowing about that place, just exactly how much about that place do you even remember?”

The place that Kamil had just mentioned was a country far, far to the south. I wonder just exactly how many people in Arxia even know the name Pactoshiki. Because Mrs. Marshan is so knowledgeable about many things, that’s why I learned the name of this place as well from her, but why does Kamil know about a far away obscure place like this.

“Well, you have a point. Because my father was from there, he taught me about it in detail.”

While laughing loudly, Kamil suddenly poured a pail of hot water on me. A large amount of the water splashed on my face, and when I glared at him reflexively, he looked back at me with a feminine seeming face and an innocent expression as if he didn’t do anything. This bastard, he’s feigning ignorance, even though he just splashed water on me, now you’ve done it! Without any maturity at all, I returned the favor by throwing all the water in my own washbasin at him.

“You damned bastard, using your washbasin is unfair!”

“It’s because Charlie started it!”

“The one who started splashing with water was you!”

The shouting and shrieking lasted for only a few seconds. A merciless fist descended on my head from above, and I saw stars in front of my eyes.

“You’re annoying, you stupid brats.”

The fist belonged to Gunther who had come in to bathe without me realizing it. There was a visible vein popping on his forehead, and his irritated voice resounded throughout the bath. As a military leader known for not going easy even on the youngest soldiers, and with an imposing aura to go along with his status…… He, he was, absolutely terrifying.

“S, sorry.”

“This raggedy brat thinking she’s going to be returning to a noble’s life tomorrow, how thickheaded can you be. You better not get soft on me. I’m still going to be in charge of your training tomorrow as well.”

I involuntarily looked at Gunther with a shocked, idiotic expression on my face. From tomorrow as well, I wonder if that means he’s going to officially become my martial arts instructor. But I had heard from Earl Terejia that I would be beginning to learn ceremonial swordsmanship befitting a noble. Kamil next to me, despite the fact that he had been horsing around just a moment ago, somehow seemed to be quite relaxed already as he asked me in a raised voice.

“Oi, what’s with your face.”

“Gunther-san, are you able to use swordsmanship for nobles?”

“Hah? Is that sort of thing even useful? ……Ah, someone seems to have been called from the capital to come teach you pretty swordsmanship.”

So what this means is that…… On top of having to endure Gunther’s grueling training, I’m also going to have a ceremonial swordsmanship instructor. Involuntarily, I became

a bit dejected, and Gunther even threatened me with saying “if you dare to make a fool of yourself and throw up in front of whatever weakling noble shows up from the capital, I’ll let you know what death is.”

His facial expression, what is it like, um..... a Nio Guardian? From my previous life’s memories that were fading more and more with each passing day, I suddenly remembered these Buddhist statues. What’s more, way too clearly.

When I returned to the Mansion of Golden Hills the next morning, Mrs. Galton and Mrs. Marshan flew out to meet me. Was it true that I was made a mockery of as a soldier in training! Basically, an extraordinarily menacing atmosphere quickly closed in on me. In a way, it felt even scarier than Gunther’s face earlier.

“I thought maybe you would be able to finally take a break, but to think that ojou-sama still has to go through such things!”

The two of them did nothing but lament over the life I had in the barracks, making a large fuss and crying over it, and even more regretfully, Earl Terejia who had left the mansion earlier to perform a village inspection returned right at this time. No matter what he said to try and comfort the two of them, they would not calm down, what’s more it was like pouring more fuel onto the fire. How pitiful, how pitiful, they kept repeating this over and over again, but because I myself was satisfied with the results of staying in the barracks, there was quite a large difference in what we thought of it.

“In order to succeed the position of viscountess, I believe that it was necessary for me to learn the proper skills to lead my domain’s troops. Is that so wrong?”

“That’s.....”

“Ahh ojou-sama, Eliza-sama, what kind of stupid things are you saying. You’re a girl. It’s inconceivable that you should be

leading an army. After graduating from school, you should be getting married immediately, and it'll be fine if you just leave the work of the domain's lord to him."

I'm too tired of this to comfort them, so I spoke bluntly and honestly about my feelings.

Although Mrs. Marshan remained silent, Mrs. Galton only got worse and began countering me. Judging by her distressed expression as if she had just heard something incredibly shocking, she was entirely against the idea of women wielding weapons. I knew that the Kaldia domain's history considered women here to be only accessories for showing off a man's power, but I didn't consider that Mrs. Galton, who came here from another region to have the same type of thoughts as well.

"Please calm down, Mrs. Galton. Indeed, while tradition dictates that the lord's position is succeeded by a man, and war is also considered to be a man's job, that doesn't mean that these things have nothing to do with women. And even Mrs. Marshan has been teaching me some of the topics necessary in consideration that I will eventually officially become the Kaldia domain's lord."

"……Yes, that's right. Although taking up arms is usually a man's job, and women usually assist their husbands and leave running the domain to them, it might not always be a good thing, Mrs. Galton. The responsibilities that have to be carried out do not distinguish between men and women."

In Arxia, noble children were educated the same without regards to gender, and since it was required for the nobility to be smarter than the commoners, they would eventually be enrolled in school for compulsory education. However, the royal family has also abolished the position of the queen, and indeed society is ruled by men. But even so, it was allowed for women to inherit noble titles associated with domains, and there are female civil officials that serve in the royal palace as

well.

Teaching is also not a profession that is open only to men. To Mrs. Marshan, who has worked as a noble school teacher before for the government as well as currently being employed as my governess, she probably found Mrs. Galton's point of view unacceptable.

"In Greenfield, if a woman works, it's said to be evidence that the man is worthless!"

"That's not the case in the royal capital. After all, women aren't merely men's accessories."

"……Since the matter at question is about me, please don't quarrel. Regardless, isn't arguing like this considered disgraceful for women?"

While I do think that Mrs. Marshan was finally able to placate Mrs. Galton successfully, I feel a little left out even though it was all about me in the first place. Since Earl Terejia and even his secretary Bellway had left again in order to work on reinforcing the army, if things had gotten any more heated up I wouldn't have known what to do. Since the two women had been glaring at each other during Mrs. Marshan's lecture, finally the issue seems to have settled down a bit on the surface.

"I'm not going to argue any more on this matter, but I'll definitely be having a word with the earl-sama about ojou-sama."

Although Mrs. Galton still seemed to bear a grudge and had to have the last word, the one who had originally tossed me into the barracks was also the earl in question. I can obviously see that it will be fruitless for her to speak to him, but I couldn't say that. If the earl personally refutes Mrs. Galton, then she'll probably have nothing more to say.

CHAPTER 8
ONE DAY DURING WINTER

Winter in the Kaldia domain is very cold. Although the weather is mild from spring through autumn, since we're south of the highest mountain range here, the Amon Nor Mountains, temperatures fall sharply during winter. Especially to the northeast, the river will freeze over as well.

Since the Kaldia domain runs longer east to west, it's usually split into the southwestern and northeastern sections, and the villages are concentrated more in the southwestern section where there are many gently rolling hills.

In the northeast there are many small lakes and rivers, but right now there's an issue of how to best make use of them. In the past, it seems that people were able to fish successfully here, but because of father's despotic policies, forcing people to work in the fields, currently the northeast is mostly pristine, untouched land.

Since Earl Terejia didn't want to just leave this land alone, he recently decided to try and do something with it, but just building up entire villages seems to be difficult. Since the northeast is closer to the mountains, many beasts will be coming down from the mountains during the winter, taking that into consideration it's a difficult location for people to be living in.

"During winter, Rashiok sure is energetic."

During my daily routine of walking Rashiok, Kamil smiled while he applied a hot bottle of tea to his cheek. I wonder if it was really that fun to sink his feet into the snow, Rashiok was flying about and jumping around on the hillside that had become completely covered in snow. Since the snow snakes

which are his main source of food hibernate during the winter, I wonder if that causes him to be the most active during the winter.

The snow that had been falling for the past two days was so soft and smooth, that it was difficult to walk. The woolen cloak I have to wear to protect against the cold is also annoying. It was already rather heavy since it reached all the way down to my knees, but since water from the snow was getting caught in the hems it became even heavier.

It's good that Rashiok seemed to be having so much fun, but today was cloudy and dim and the ground was slippery, and I'm really fed up with this biting cold. It's the first time since I've reincarnated that I've experienced the winter outside, and I quickly assessed that I wasn't going to get accustomed to this.

Since the grain had been harvested, there was nothing other than the mansion and barracks to obstruct my vision, and the snow-covered, silent hills created quite the lonesome scenery. While chasing Rashiok and creasing my eyebrows because my eyes were smarting from the cold, Kamil would occasionally stop me from time to time if it seemed like I was about to accidentally leave the area under direct control. Because there was no signs or marks, it was hard to keep good track of distance.

"It's cold……"

"It's fine to walk Rashiok for a little bit more. When we return, Nathan should have boiled eggs and soup prepared for us."

Reflexively I had complained a little about the cold to Kamil. As the son of a large merchant that had been to many other countries, he's surprisingly good at calming people down. I feel it must be the merchant blood in him.

It's very regrettable that his father the merchant has already

passed away. That's because Arxians with information on other cultures are few and far between. It would have been nice if I could have heard stories about other countries as well, is what I thought, but there's no helping it. Since Kamil had been too young at the time, it seems that he's forgotten most of the stories about other countries. What bad luck.

"There's even boiled eggs, eh. How luxurious."

"It seems like Claria village bought some chickens from the Henznaut domain this year. If they breed them successfully, you'll be able to have boiled eggs more often next year."

"Ahh, I see."

From time to time, Kamil was also able to share information with me that I did not know. He had originally been assigned to me from the domain's army in order to help me take care of Rashiok and be my personal bodyguard, and after all this time being with him it seems that he's actually a nice guy after all. Maybe it's because he's an excellent conversationalist, good at making idle chatter and gossip.

In the Jugfena region, boiled eggs are supposed to represent providence, so they were usually supposed to be eaten on religious holidays. Unfortunately, the Kaldia domain has currently lost most of its knowledge on livestock breeding due to my father's fault.

We had been relying on imports from other domains up until now, but this year, starting with chickens, we were beginning to re-establish our own supply of livestock. The plan for next year is to begin seeing what fish we can gather from the rivers and lakes in the northeast. The other project is to start seeing if we can begin to have the people in our domain raise crops other than grains.

"……Charlie? Did you start praying all of a sudden or something?"

“It’s because I was welcoming the chickens that are being imported to my domain. Is that so strange?”

“Ahh, I guess it’s fine. Charlie must be very pious.”

I shrugged in response to Kamil’s eyes which still had some wondering to them. Prayer, is usually supposed to be offered in respect to the gods, but the only one I’m thankful to is Earl Terejia. Unlike what Kamil said, I’m actually not a devout member of the Ar Xia church. After all, I don’t believe in anything like the existence of gods at all.

I had only stopped to think for a few seconds, but before I realized it Rashiok had already gotten several meters ahead of me. I hurriedly ran to catch up. Even if Rashiok can be a bit errant, he’s pretty smart and can find his way back to the mansion on his own, but if we returned to the mansion without him we would certainly be lectured by the earl.

Without paying heed to us, Rashiok who had been playing around suddenly stopped. He plunged his nose into the snow, and was sniffing something. I wonder what he could have found. Then, he suddenly retreated and headed towards us while barking furiously, running through the snow with amazing momentum.

“I wonder what happened.”

“Maybe he’s found something that can be food? On a hunt before, I’ve seen the ground move like that once, it had been a rizer.”

“Eh, rizer!?”

Kamil’s voice suddenly became greatly frenzied. Well, that’s to be expected. The rizer is said to be closer related to a mouse than a mole, and it’s a type of gigantic lizard that lives underground. It’s also considered extremely valuable both as food, and as materials for creating weapons and armor.

“Come to think of it, unluckily you weren’t there with me at that time. Because of that, two rizers got away last time.”

“Two escaped!? What a waste!!”

“How do you expect me to catch a lizard that’s even bigger than I am? With my strength, I couldn’t even pierce one with a spear.”

“Well, that’s true, but……”

While we were busy arguing, Rashiok had been single-mindedly digging in the snow. Without hesitation, I used my hands which were covered in leather gloves to begin digging too. At seeing this, Kamil said “something like a noble girl digging around in the snow……” but right now it’s getting to the good part, so I can’t stop. Besides, no matter where you look in Arxia, where would you find a noble that’s eaten spiders before?

After he joined me as well in digging together with Rashiok, progress went pretty fast. The soil was dug up in a few minutes, and the frozen earth beneath that took another several minutes. Then, my leather gloves touched the hard scales of a hibernating rizer.

“It’s here.”

We dug up all around it until we could see all of it, and carefully examined our prey.

“……It’s pretty big. I think it’s about six feet long.”

“Let’s kill it now that we’ve dug it up.”

As soon as I said so, Kamil pulled out his sword from his waist, and accurately pierced through the rizer’s head with a single stab. I was a little involuntarily stunned as I looked at Kamil. The head had been sliced clean off the rizer. It should have been very difficult to kill the rizer off with a single attack. After all, his sword is heavy. If he goes too slowly, the sword

might shake, and if he swung too fast the sword's weight might have caused it to go off-track. That's why it's surprising that Kamil seems to have done it so easily. I don't think even Gunther has this level of swordsmanship.

"You're surprisingly good at swordsmanship."

At seeing me staring at him, Kamil laughed with an ambiguous expression on his face. From what I could see, he was merely feigning ignorance yet again.

CHAPTER 9
I RECEIVED A HORSE

Elisa

Author's note: This is Eliza when she's young, at six years old. However, it's a little rough because I drew it in a hurry… I think this hardened look is probably her most typical expression. She's wearing the typical tunic and dalmatic that's standard casual wear in her domain.

With the coming of spring, it's become a bit busier here at the Mansion of Golden Hills. It's going to be my first birthday celebration in four years.

In the Arxia Kingdom, one's birthday is supposed to be celebrated only during three certain times a year. After the fields are planted in the spring, during the next full moon after a religious holiday in the summer, or after the autumn harvest. Since I had been born during the end of winter, my birthday would be celebrated after the fields were planted in spring.

Although in my previous life I didn't really care about birthdays one way or the other, since the lord's birthday is supposed to be celebrated by the entire domain, or simply speaking, it's supposed to be an event to please the people in my domain. Under the pretext of celebrating, it's also a way to hand out food, wine, and candy to my people.

So that the people have their fun, it's going to continue for an entire three days, and even though it's rather bothersome to me, as the leading role I have to pretend to enjoy it.

It seems that Earl Terejia is preparing most of my birthday celebration. Recently, I've had more opportunities to see him working up close. I'm actually wondering if it should be considered abuse of the elderly because I can't help with the work yet. I would be very troubled if he dies from overwork now……

In the first place, after he came here and became my regent, he's worked so hard for the sake of stabilizing my domain in order to pass on to me later. I wondered if it was really necessary to work so hard to the extent of wearing out his body. I know that he's a bit mercenary and calculating, but no matter what, Earl Terejia has been a great help in rebuilding

and reviving the Kaldia domain for me. I really wouldn't know what to do if he were to be crushed under his workload.

Having said that, I don't have the ability to take over his job just yet, nor is there anyone else that can assist him, so all I can do for now is cheer him on, meaning other than obediently receiving the education he prepares for me, I have nothing else I can do.

As for the education he's gifted me, the thing that stands out the most is equestrianism. Recently on the continent, strategies revolving around the use of cavalry have been evolving rapidly. Warhorses specially prepared for military use have been improved as well, it's because of the recent invention of the easy to use leather stirrup becoming widespread. Large scale infantry combat tactics have been established since seven hundred years ago, while riding a horse was originally allowed to only military commanders, the nobles have begun to study cavalry tactics and incorporate cavalry soldiers in order to improve their armies.

By the way, it seems that battles up until seven hundred years ago used to be leaderless groups of people battling other leaderless groups of people to the death. What's more, the icing on the cake is that the first recorded army in history had been organized over two thousand years ago by the ancient King Iruhan of Injatoliska.

Injatoliska had been destroyed long before an actual organized military system became widespread seven hundred years ago, when the Ar Xia Holy Kingdom invented a chain of command system for the sake of national defense which replaced the leaderless mob battles that had been common up until then.

Well, enough gossip.

Since the Arxia Kingdom specializes in defensive war, that's

why the kingdom's policy is to avoid war.

To begin with, the sea is to the north and west of Arxia, the southwest has the Amon Karan Mountains and the northeast has the Amon Nor Mountains that have become our national borders, so of course there would be little need for cavalry troops in the army. The current situation here in the southeastern part of Arxia, is that the Jugfena royal domain, Margrave Genas's domain, Earl Ruktoferd's domain, and Earl Freche's domains are the only ones that have small cavalry troops. For various reasons, it seems that the House of Lords has been planning the expansion of armaments in the Jugfena region.

And in the Kaldia domain, since its army had been practically nonexistent, it seems that it's been approved for us to attempt training cavalry troops on an experimental basis.

Earl Terejia having been so passionate about strengthening my domain's army, probably was because he knew about the expansion of armaments in the Jugfena region and the approval for the Kaldia domain to train cavalry troops. What a frightening person……

Right when winter had begun, the House of Lords had decided to provide my domain with three warhorses to start with. It was scheduled for thirty more warhorses to be deployed next year. And so, sixty members of the army, would be divided into two platoons, and half of them would be used as cavalry soldiers at any time.

One of the three horses that had already arrived, a relatively smaller gelding, was for my training. The other two horses were given to the high ranked military officers Calvin and Agil, that had been chosen to lead the cavalry troops. The horsemanship teacher that had been prepared for me was a retired former cavalry soldier from Earl Ruktoferd's domain, and if he had time Earl Terejia would also sometimes

personally teach me the best he could. Training for Rashiok who had yet to mature also began so I could ride him in the future, but because his intelligence was extremely high it seems like very little training was necessary.

“Alright, this is fine.”

It’s two days after the full moon in the first month of the year. After the end of the day’s riding lessons, Earl Terejia made a sign of approval. My sixth birthday’s celebration is about one month away, it seems that it will begin flashily with me leading my domain’s troops on horseback around the villages. I still can’t ride on Rashiok yet as of right now, so for this time’s celebration it seems that he will have to stay quietly in the mansion while the celebrations are going on.

“Thank you very much.”

Even though he was so busy, Earl Terejia was very passionate about teaching me how to control a horse. He’s dedicating this much time to teaching me all in order so that my skills can improve enough to the point of adequacy by the time of my birthday celebration. Since I passed today successfully, I started thinking about things and my head naturally fell lower.

Then, I felt a hand patting me on the head for one short moment. Ah, when I realized it and lifted my head, Earl Terejia’s back was already departing from my sight.

When I returned to my room, Rashiok was laying on the floor by my bed relaxedly. Although I thought it was rare since he had always been playing by the pond recently, when I think a little more about it he does intrude here quite often too.

“You, came in here without permission again..... Huh?”

Since this smart creature can easily open doors, I wasn’t surprised at all to see him here at first. But, something was

different today. Something that seemed like his skin was flaking off was on the floor by Rashiok.

“W, what’s this? Are you sick?”

Rashiok himself seemed to have a nonchalant expression, but I wonder if he’s suffering from some skin disease. I immediately made sure that there were no abnormalities in his smooth, scaly skin. His glossy scales were unscratched and beautiful, and if it wasn’t for the layer of skin on the floor around him I’d think it ridiculous that he was sick.

Because I had no idea what to do, I called for “Doctor” Kamil. It’s best if I ask about something like this from him as quickly as possible.

“I came because I heard that Rashiok might be ill..... Charlie, he’s just molting.”

After that, saying something about how worried the expression on my face was, he couldn’t hold his laughter in anymore and exploded into laughter, holding his belly and slapping his knees, what a rude fellow. Although I said that I’d forgive his irreverence before, why is it that this guy is always inciting my irritation to the maximum level. To the point of even slapping your knees, don’t you know the damage you’re doing to me, as I got angrier.

But anyways, so it was just molting. I had completely forgotten about the fact that snakes and lizards would go through molting. Since the draconis is mostly wolfen, I had never considered that he would need to go through molting like a lizard. Come to think of it, he has become whiter recently. Since he’s been left alone to do as he liked in the garden these past few days, I hadn’t seen him closely recently, but now I remember that he did look a little different when seeing him from afar.

“It’s fine it’s fine, this is evidence that Rashiok is maturing

properly. A draconis will begin molting when its body begins to grow. Anyways…… if the stories are correct, Rashiok will eventually reach over three times his current size. He might be too difficult to use when he's that big, huh……"

Indeed, it was already impossible to find dogs that were larger than Rashiok was. The cost of raising him has to be outweighed by the benefits. It would be unreasonable for me to raise him only as a pet. Rashiok is currently now large enough for me to ride on him without any problems.

"I wonder if it's possible to create a draconis rider team, on the scale of a small squad."

"That, would probably be very inefficient."

"But if I'm able to fly on a draconis, I'll be able to secure air superiority."

"Eh, huh? What is that?"

Kamil tilted his head with a puzzled expression on his face, but I pretended not to hear him. Air superiority, is what I had just said, but truth be told I don't understand the term all that well myself.

My previous life's memories were fading bit by bit. Maybe it's because my father's no longer alive, so I don't really mind, but if I sometimes let a word slip out that people don't understand, it could be a problem.

CHAPTER 10
MARCHING TRAINING

Did you know that the foundations of basic military training are equivalent to marching training? During my three months of living in the barracks, I had trained in this for hours and hours every day. The amount was so unbelievable that I want to throw up blood at the very thought of how much it was every day……

“Oi brat, your eyes are dead.”

The relentless verbal abuse from Gunther marching next to me barely managed to reach me. I had gotten lost in thought during training for a moment, at his sound I quickly corrected my posture and improved my awareness.

There’s still two full moons until my birthday celebration, I’m now working hard at training for leading the domain’s army. Since I had to pay attention to both my horse and Rashiok, if I let my attention slip for even a little bit I would fall off from my horse. Today I’m not riding a small gelding for practice, but a large stallion. I had to concentrate with all my might to keep the stallion in ranks with the marching soldiers.

“It’ll be better if you loosen the tension in your shoulder slightly. If the horse thinks you’re scared, it’ll look down on you.”

“Yes.”

Earl Terejia who was supervising the march rode up to me and offered a suggestion. Even though his horse was so quiet, mine was completely restless and shaking his head about. Since it would still be the same even if I swapped horses with the earl, it’s simply a matter of my lacking riding skills. It’s only

natural, since I think it's ridiculous to expect a six year old to be able to control a warhorse in active service, but……

To lead, I have to often give my horse directions to turn left, right, or stop, further increasing the difficulty level. Soldiers were escorting me to the front, left, and right, and behind me were forty soldiers in rank and file. It was also hard to match their timing. I wish this was only a marching band.

……I wonder why I suddenly remembered such a thing. I have no idea how memory recollection works.

We arrived at our target location, and then began heading back towards the Mansion of Golden Hills in order to restock up on our water supply. Because we had already made three round trips, both people and horses were at their limits, when the earl dismissed us it seemed like everyone half collapsed, it was like we were all crawling back to the barracks. But even so we're going to have to get ready for this all over again tomorrow, what actual soldiers do is really quite amazing.

"Welcome back."

I was greeted by Kamil who had left during our second round trip to run errands, and right when I entered the mansion, I heard the earl calling for me, saying "when you're done cleaning yourself up and changing, come to the drawing room."

To be called to the drawing room at this time…… There's probably around an eighty percent chance that it's a guest that's come early for my birthday celebration. The other twenty percent is that the earl is having me greet his guest.

I hurriedly wiped down my body, changed my clothes, and fixed my hairstyle as directed, then headed for the drawing room. Since my room had already been well prepared with a washbasin of hot water and a towel and clean clothes in advance, it was nice that I only had to move mechanically like

a robot.

“I’ve made you wait.”

“Ahh, perfect timing. The introductions were just finishing up.”

Kamil had been waiting for me in front of the drawing room, and after he checked my appearance, he knocked on the door to the drawing room. Eliza-sama has arrived, please enter, the door opened right after that short exchange.

I was immediately ambushed by a strange sensation.

Sitting across from Earl Terejia on a couch for visitors, was an elderly man who looked just like the earl. His clothes, facial expression, and hairstyle were different, but there was no mistaking how similar their features were. In surprise at how alike they looked, I couldn’t help looking him up and down.

“Marquis, this here is Viscountess Eliza-dono. Lady Eliza, this here is Senior Marquis Rittergau. He is my older brother.”

The earl smoothly introduced his guest this way. Even though they were relatives and looked alike, I still felt like something was off. I felt like something dangerous I couldn’t see was in the air, perhaps it’s like this between noble relatives.

“I believe this is our first meeting, Viscountess Eliza. My name is Radian Terejia Rittergau.”

“It’s an honor to meet you, Marquis Rittergau. Allow me to introduce myself, my name is Eliza Kaldia.”

Compared to the earl who always had a stern look to his face, Marquis Rittergau had a nice smile that made him seem like a good-natured grandfather. – I immediately noticed that his smile seemed to contain something terribly cold. His eyes weren’t smiling in the slightest. As if observing me, he looked over me from top to bottom with his sharp gaze, then he seemed to lose interest in me and looked over at the earl again.

But anyways, so Marquis Rittergau had been Earl Terejia's older brother. I wonder why I haven't heard they were related before, as I pulled on my right cheek and thought things over.

Senior Marquis Rittergau. A prestigious noble who was the prime minister of the Arxia Kingdom, as well as the head of the Terejia family. An aristocrat who had been bestowed a name from the king.

……So his younger brother had been the earl. It seems that my guardian has someone quite powerful behind him. Since the Terejia family is a large family with eleven branch families, I had thought that someone who would be sent here to the countryside would have been from one of the minor branch families.

Even though he's the younger brother of the family head, the earl didn't set up his own family branch, nor does he have lands of his own despite being so talented, it feels like there's something to be concerned about if that's the case. However, I'm not going to simply stick my neck out and pry into the situation. What I should do is leave it alone, since my powers are limited. I don't even have anything to do with the Terejia family issues to begin with.

Yep, as I nodded to myself and decided upon that in my mind, I listened obediently to the Terejia brothers' conversation. Everything they talked about was something interesting and not boring at all, but the fact that they talked about nothing important whatsoever is what's fearsome about these elderly nobles. There was always a beautiful response to the previous person that wouldn't offend, and there was no place for me in the conversation at all. However, it was very educational for my conversational skills.

As the earl's older brother, Marquis Rittergau's age was considerably shocking in the Arxia Kingdom, and his presence and demeanor were quite powerful. I feel like the upper

echelons of Arxian society are making the elderly work too hard. It seems that he's visiting from the royal capital for two days, and that he'll be returning tomorrow.

Although I know that the prime minister probably doesn't have much free time, wouldn't it be better for his body to work a little less and relax a bit, I wonder. Although with the type of person he is, he would probably find that kind of thinking an unnecessary bother.

– That night. Marquis Rittergau, much like his brother had done before, approached me while I was standing by the window. The starry night sky appeared distorted through the thick panes of colorless stained glass.

"Aren't you cold, Viscountess Kaldia?"

Calling me "Viscountess Kaldia" while I didn't know his intentions, just that alone was to enough to make goosebumps run down my flesh and for me to fully tense up.

"It's no problem for me at all. Since I'm still a child, my body temperature is higher. If I get cold, I can just ask my maid to start a fire for me."

"I would be thankful for that. My old bones are weak against the cold."

Even though he said that, Marquis Rittergau showed no signs of intending to leave. I wonder if he has something he wants to discuss with me. Even though I'm only a mere child, does the super big shot Marquis Rittergau have something to say to me?

I can't conceal how tense I am. It's better to let it show, rather than trying to pretend at being natural. Since I'm only a six year old child, he'll probably think something like "she's nervous about manners around the important adult." The marquis wasn't looking at me though, but rather at the

distorted sky outside the window.

"……What do you happen to think that the nobility is?"

He asked me a question after remaining silent for a while. Nobility. In my previous life, it had no longer been important. My fate now though, is that my life is both supported by it and threatened because of it.

So what is nobility, I wonder. What to do, how to do it, and what it is. I want to know about such things too.

"……I don't know."

Although I tried thinking about it for well over ten seconds, I couldn't think of anything to say that sounded like it fit. After all, my current position is as if it's floating in space. Like a ghost in society, no matter what I said, there was no weight or power to my words.

"So you're saying that you recognize your own ignorance? …… How wise of you to know that you do not know. There's so many countless people that do not realize the ignorance of their own knowledge."

I also don't know the answer to that question myself, is what I heard him muttering under his breath.

CHAPTER 11
MY FIRST BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

It was finally time for my birthday celebration, right when my fatigue had reached its peak from preparing for it every day. Starting from today, for the next three days it'll be hellishly busy until I can finally take a break.

"……Stop laughing constantly."

Among the heavily exhausted mood in the air, there was one bastard who was cheerfully laughing. It was Kamil. He was holding his stomach, laughing at my outfit. It's so annoying, I can't stand it.

"But! ……Ha, hehehehe……"

What a terrible bastard. So annoying. His voice is infuriating, and even covering up the sound of my own thoughts. Because I'm so tired, even the small things are annoying.

But, the reason why Kamil was laughing so hard was because of the irritating outfit I had to wear. Everyone thinks that I look ridiculous so I'm in a bad mood. I wasn't able to choose my own outfit for the celebration, it was something the earl had picked out for me.

My hair was coiled in a bun on top of my head, with casual accessories and I was in elaborate, formal knight wear and a mantle. No matter how you look at it, it's an outfit for boys. Originally, as a respectable girl, I should have been wearing a circlet and bliaud.

"There's no helping it. It's the custom."

Earl Terejia who was next to me said so in a subdued voice. The domain lord had to personally tour the domain while he or she was still a minor for the birthday celebrations. And, for

the celebration, the Arxian custom for nobles is to wear formal knight attire. If he hadn't been dead, my father probably would have been wearing this.

Up until now no young girls had ever inherited the domain lord's position, so unfortunately I have become the first ever example. Earl Terejia still dressed me in the customary knightly formal attire..... I guess this means that my birthday celebration will be done as if I were a boy.

It's finally time for me to get on horseback and lead the marching troops. Indeed as Mrs. Marshan had said so before, leading an army really wasn't for women. Also, riding a horse in a dress would be disastrous.

With this taken into consideration, I really don't see why Kamil had been laughing so hard up until now. He doesn't think that this formal attire for boys is unfitting for me. Rather, it's something more like it's too fitting.

"It, it's perfect on you..... Hehehe..... Charlie isn't cute at all..... Hehe."

.....It's reversed. It looked much better on me than expected. Is that really so funny? Well, there's hardly any differences between boys and girls when they're six years old, shouldn't it not matter that much what they wear? I feel like I'll never understand in my life just what is it that this guy finds funny.

Our parade that had left early in the morning passed slowly through the villages. The people were quite different from the last time I had seen them, when they were filled with eyes that had wanted to kill my father and his retainers. Although they still seemed quite poor, it was a longs ways off from the unimaginable time when they were nothing but skin and bones with empty eyes. They've improved thanks to the earl.

However, the number of villagers that seemed joyed at seeing me were rather limited in number, I saw quite a few people

who didn't even try to conceal how much hatred was in their eyes directed at me.

I guess they still can't forgive the fact that I'm a Kaldia.

I didn't let it affect the smile on my face, and continued leading the parade as I had practiced in training. No matter which village we moved on to, there was a complicated mix of feelings directed at me.

I thought back to when the earl had just constructed the barracks. Now, the soldiers' murderous intent towards me had faded, their attitudes toward me had gradually eased up from the point of seeming to want to tear me apart with their eyes.

Much like that time, the people are taking out their hatred of my father through me. The eyes say what the mouth doesn't, is a phrase I suddenly remembered. Everyone's bitter expressions testified to the veracity of that phrase, as they couldn't forgive me for being the daughter of that cruel, unforgivable domain lord.

However, at the same time, they also seemed to be at a loss for what to do, and had expectations. After all, it was unmistakeable that my guardian Earl Terejia had been the people's savior. Therefore, the domain's people saw not only my father in me, but also the earl. And, because two opposites overlapped, they were lost.

For the domain's soldiers to finally look out for me, it had taken three months before they got used to me. I wonder how long it'll be for my domain's people.

They can't see the work that's being done in the domain lord's mansion. I wonder how long it'll take for my people to approve of me as the domain lord.

Although on the surface it appeared to be glamorous, joyful revelry, on the inside everyone was actually fully tensed up. There was nobody else who was going to relieve the tension.

Otherwise, there wouldn't have been a point to the earl's preparing this birthday celebration. I'm a bit amazed at my own wishful thinking, but I still think it's something worth doing.

The final village we were visiting, Shiriru village, had a strange kind of tension to it as expected, just like all the other villages. No..... The atmosphere seemed to be heavier in this village, to the point where I could feel like murderous intentions were stabbing at me through the air.

Because Shiriru village is the village that's the farthest away from the area under direct control, reconstruction has been the slowest here. In other words, the benevolent influence that the earl had was very limited.

Although the villagers had made a sparse runway of flowers along the parade's path, their expressions seemed more like they were cursing rather than celebrating, it was severely depressing. With the hostility of the villagers, I felt so tense that it gnawed away at me. To them, their hatred towards my father is not merely a thing of the past. It's to the point where it's like a lump lodged in their chests.

".....You alright?"

Kamil beside me was worried about me and asked how I was in a low voice, but I only shook my head slightly in reply. Even though the temperature was still chilly, I had a bad feeling about things and sweat was trickling down along my cheeks to my chin.

"I'll report to the earl. We need to take a break after leaving this village."

"Sorry about this."

Even though my response was an apology, Kamil ignored my ambiguous reply and headed for the soldier ranks in the front where the earl was. I was slightly relieved that Kamil had

showed some concern for me, and my breathing had improved without my realizing it from the shallow breaths I was taking earlier.

At that moment, there was a sudden commotion from the people lined up towards the right. Right when I thought something had happened and turned to look, half of my vision turned black from a shadow hurtling towards me.

“Uu!!”

Along with a dull thud, pain ran along my forehead from the shock of the impact. At dealing with something unexpected, my body swayed, and I unconsciously grabbed onto the reins.

Ah, when I remembered it was already too late. Since I had suddenly pulled on the reins, my horse neighed and stood up on its hind legs. I was being shaken about so quickly that I couldn’t see clearly, and soon, my body was midair.

My back slammed into the ground, knocking my breath out of me. I couldn’t breathe due to the impact, and along with a strong ringing in my ears, my consciousness was fading.

A large number of people were shouting something. In my blurry vision, I saw lots of metallic silver from the soldiers glittering around me.

What had happened. A rock had been thrown at me.

Who threw it. The villagers. Someone from Shiriru village.

Due to a lack of oxygen, I was panting. The soldiers had drawn their swords. The strained tension from earlier had been completely cut. Both soldiers and villagers were panicking.

Don’t kill them, is what I tried saying. Since I was out of breath, my voice wouldn’t come out. I dug into the dirt with my nails out of impatience.

Don’t kill. Don’t kill anyone. If someone is killed now, a grudge shall remain. I could hear the earl’s voice repeating this many times, although it was muffled and distant.

That’s right. Don’t kill anyone. If anyone is killed here today, all the work that’s been accomplished over the past four years will be destroyed in an instant.

Did my voice come out or not. I don’t know anything else that happened, as I just kept saying don’t kill them over and over again in my mind with my consciousness fading.

CHAPTER 12
THE HATRED IN THEIR EYES

"- Eliza-sama!!"

As if I had just emerged from underwater, my five senses suddenly became clear all at once. The first thing I saw was Kamil's pale face, then it was the blue sky behind him. At the same time, I heard a dozen people making such a commotion that I couldn't make out anything that was being said.

My head hurts so much. It especially hurts if I move, I wonder if I have a concussion. It's quite possible because I fell off of my horse.

"……Kamil?"

"Nobody's died, or even been injured. With the exception of you. It's because a certain someone was moaning don't kill them so much."

He immediately gave me a straightforward report, probably trying to give me peace of mind. For now, it's enough that I know this much. Kamil wiped my forehead with a wet cloth using his fingertips, and looked at me in silence. I felt as sluggish as if I had just been sprinting with all my might.

I've been transported without me realizing it, I seem to be lying down on a flat stretch of ground close to the river outside of Shiriru village. Judging from the position of the sun, it doesn't seem like all that much time has passed.

On top of my heart still beating like crazy, even though I had slammed into my back, I couldn't feel any pain there. Although I had only remained conscious for several seconds after the rock hit my forehead, but leaving the village in all that chaos…… It probably took a minimum of at least ten

minutes. I don't know what happened during that time, but it seems like nothing big or shocking occurred.

As if to surround me, soldiers were resting all around me. I could hear the high pitched shrieks of children, but it was too bothersome to turn my neck.

"Ahh, Charlie is really such a blockhead."

"What's with that, suddenly."

After he finished wiping down my wounds, Kamil abruptly sighed. In this incident, I wonder if there really had been something I'd done that I'd be called a blockhead.

"You've been clawing really hard. This is going to hurt later."

Kamil pointed at my left hand which he had just wiped as he said so. ……Come to think of it, rather than pain, it does seem like there's a sense of discomfort. I had probably used too much strength when I was digging into the dirt with my nails earlier. I really don't have anything to say in response to being called a blockhead, because it was indeed a silly injury.

"I'm going to go wash this cloth. Although the soldiers will be guarding you and you won't be alone, you definitely can't just do as you please right now, okay?"

"……Even without you saying that, I can't even stand up by myself right now. I'll behave and just rest right here."

I watched Kamil leave with the cloth, and finally let go of my breath. With my back, fingers, and forehead, the pain was gradually subsiding, and since the chaos in Shiriru village had been resolved without a single injury, I was able to breathe a sigh of relief.

When I had fallen off my horse, in combination with their accumulated fatigue and tension, the soldiers had completely lost their direction without leadership.

If they had misused their military power and weapons, they might have affected others not connected to the person who had thrown the rock. If that had happened, the domain would have been endangered. Just because one of the villagers had thrown a rock, that would be no reason to indiscriminately attack the villagers under one's domain.

After four years of effort by the earl, the energy and willpower that father had sapped from the people was finally returning. However, the people still had a sense of distrust for the nobility, and especially since I was a Kaldia, their hatred for me continued.

The people had survived the hellish man-made disaster wrought by my father, but it wouldn't be strange at all if they had tried to take revenge on me and kill me, this territory is currently under a very fragile balance.

Really, it's good that nobody was killed. – No, there might be one person that will be killed.

On the other side of the soldiers that were resting, was a child who had been endlessly screaming and trying to escape from his restraints, causing a commotion. Even for the earl, he probably couldn't predict a child's actions. The rash behavior of children was supposed to be suppressed by adults, but not accounting for orphans had been his failure.

By the time Kamil returned, my headache felt slightly better, and I was somehow able to sit up by myself. I stood up borrowing the strength of Kamil's arm, and asked him to take me to the child who was crying and screaming. Although he frowned, Kamil lent me his arm without saying anything.

The one who threw the rock at me had been an orphan from Shiriru village. The father was unknown, since the mother had gotten pregnant during "forced labor," and the child's mother

had been so upset about it that she had committed suicide soon after giving birth.

I forced down my dizziness and nausea, and I looked straight into the child's cloudy eyes. The child's arms were being held down by soldiers, and was a thin kid in poor shape. The child's malnourished body seemed even younger than me. In the child's dark eyes, was unconcealable murderous intent and a desperate desire to break free from the adults.

"Did you throw the rock, simply because I'm the daughter of a Kaldia? Or did you have some other reason?"

"Why would there be any other reason!? It would have been better if you'd died as well four years ago!"

The child shouted until even the voice became raspy and hoarse, sounding much lower than a child should. When I thought about how this was a legacy that my father had left me, I almost felt like laughing at the disgusting situation.

In order to stop the raging child from resisting, the soldiers had pinned the child's arms to the ground. Although the skinny child seemed like a withered tree branch on the ground, but there was no fear at all. How resolute.

"What, you think it's funny? You were only a baby back then, so you think whatever your damned dad did had nothing to do with you?"

The child's voice traveled low along the ground. It's almost praiseworthy how clear the malice and murderous intent are. If it weren't for the soldiers around, the glare indicated that there was a possibility of actually acting on it.

"Is that really so?"

"While you were drinking your milk and sleeping every day, how many people do you think died?"

It should have nothing to do with me. After all, when I was

two, I was being comfortably raised up by that disgusting excuse for a lord. If even that's a crime, to the point of being hated where people think it would have been better if I had died, that's so childish that it's hilarious. Well, it's as expected of a child who hasn't even reached ten yet.

In this world, the system of extending complicity for a crime to the criminal's family members is used. For heinous criminals, the entire family would be executed, and even babies in different households, if they were nieces or nephews, would be included. Under that logic, it is indeed strange that I'm still alive.

– But, what of it. Since I'm currently alive as an exception to the norm, I have no intentions whatsoever of committing suicide because of drowning in guilt, or allowing myself to be killed by the people in my domain.

"72."

"……Eh?"

"From the time since I was born, I know about 72 people in this domain that have died. 23 died while being sent off as 'labor' to other territories, 11 died of natural causes, and 6 have gone missing. What of it?"

If the child really insists that the people that have died since I was born is my fault, I'll just accept it for now.

I had first recalled my previous life's memories a bit before I turned one. Horrible things such as murder, everything rotten known to man were the foolish ideals here, I had spent a year watching the lives of the people being spent as if they were disposable consumables.

After that is when I had found the poisonous hemlock by the edge of the pond close to the garden. The soup for the domain lord's family had been placed in a corner of the kitchen for cooling after it was prepared, and there had only been two

cooks left alive of the original seven in the kitchen, so sneaking in had been simple. The ingredients that father had collected for his own tasting, it was forbidden for the commoner cooks to even think of tasting them, and anyone caught would not be forgiven and killed.

After I had obtained the poison, because I had hesitated about using it for so long, close to 40 more people died. That might be said to be my crime, but who's going to know?

"That's, that's!"

"I'm alive. The fact that I'm alive means, I don't want to die. Let me ask you back. Why do you think I still haven't killed you yet?"

I released Kamil's arm that I had been supporting myself with, and pulled out his ceremonial dagger from his waist. Even though its thin blade was decorative, it was still sharp enough to slice through a person's skin.

In those cloudy dark eyes, I saw fear for the first time.

CHAPTER 13
LIFE'S HARD MODE

"You probably haven't even thought about the possibility of getting killed, right?"

I grabbed the child's hair and pressed it into the ground much like I would with an insect. After pulling away the hair and exposing the throat, I pressed the point of the blade against it.

The child gulped down a breath. Even so the child kept glaring resolutely, how courageous for a child this age.

"According to the words of the shrine maiden Xia Fema, sinners must be made to atone for their crimes with the appropriate punishment, in order to cleanse the soul of impurities. Then, how about if I immediately give you the death penalty here?"

"……If you're going to kill me, stop acting so pompous and hurry up with it already. Something like that, would have been nothing at all to your mom!"

Although the sentiment is admirable that the child was still so spirited while barking at me, it's foolish.

"- Put this child in the basement dungeons. It would be bad to spill blood during the festival."

I returned the dagger to Kamil, and left the child's line of sight. The child was somewhat clever and impertinent, but I know well now that this person's just a simple child. Yes, and on the surface Kamil seemed obedient and respectfully lowered his head, and with his instructions the soldiers began tying the child up with rope.

"What's this! In the end, you couldn't even kill me!"

While twisting around and trying to escape from the soldiers, the child was still shouting. I ignored all of it, and called out to Kamil again.

“Haul fifteen people from the village that have some relation to this child to the mansion. It’s fine even if they are children.”

“Yes.”

“Wh…… What! The villagers have nothing to do with this!”

The child suddenly went berserk in a frenzy, and I laughed inside. Once again I ignored it, and I indicated to the soldiers that they should carry it out immediately. Before long, I could no longer hear the child’s voice due to a cloth gag.

“……What do you intend to do with that child? Charlie.”

Kamil held out his arm without me having to say anything, but maybe it’s because he’s interested or something, he asked me that with an emotion I couldn’t quite identify in his voice.

“I don’t know the answer to that question yet, since I haven’t decided upon it myself. For the time being, I’ll talk about it with the earl first. We can’t have the original plans for the birthday celebration get even more off track.”

While being supported by Kamil, I headed for the earl who was only a little off in the distance from us.

The soldiers’ bodies seemed to be rather rigid, as I took his hand. After witnessing my exchange where I confronted the child, staring directly into the eyes, sharp gazes were aimed at me. They seemed to be somewhat frightened and on guard against me. Perhaps in their hearts they’ve gotten farther away from me again.

However, this would have been necessary someday. I can’t always be seen by them as a child that they can be overly familiar with. I’m not a child that they can get emotionally attached to, it’s necessary to make them recognize and admit

me as their lord that's supposed to be their leader.

……Since it seems rather difficult, I'm getting a little depressed. I've gotten carried away by the mood, I wonder if this is fortunate or unfortunate.

The sun indicated that it's now sometime in the afternoon. We've finally returned to the mansion, and the soldiers' eyes were shining at the feast that had been prepared for them. The first day of my birthday celebration is supposed to be for the people. The afternoon had been marching around the villages, providing the people with food and drink, for the sake of the villagers. At night, to thank the soldiers for their efforts, there would be a banquet at the mansion.

Considering the incident that had happened earlier in the day, it was decided to end the festivities immediately after the customary gift exchanging. It would probably be good for the soldiers as well to end things quietly without a fuss. They weren't drinking wine and remaining sober like children, looking down on the ground with cold eyes, it was clearly as if water had been poured over the mood of the feast.

With help from Mrs. Galton, I changed out of the tight, formal knight attire and back into a comfortable tunic and dalmatic. The dalmatic wasn't decorated with high class accessories, but it had a complicated weave pattern. The people hate it when the nobility are too luxurious. In order to avoid unnecessary backlash, the earl had decided to not use jewelry to decorate my outfit, but spent more money on tailoring the cloth instead.

After I finished getting dressed I supported myself against the door, and raised my voice to Mrs. Galton who was tidying up my formal wear. Recently she had gotten worse about trying to make me into her idea of a traditional girl. In her

home region of Greenfield, the ideal girl was considered to be a housewife that didn't go out and work, and she seems to be seriously trying to apply that type of education to me. Although I am a girl, but before that the education necessary for a domain lord should be much more important.

"I'm going out for a bit. Remain here."

"Eliza-sama, where..... are you going by yourself?"

I pulled away from the hand that Mrs. Galton held out in offer to me, walked briskly out and quickly closed the door behind me. As long as I got a little distance between me and Mrs. Galton, she'll never find me. She'd never imagine that I'd be going to the basement dungeons.

The basement dungeons here in the mansions, had been wastefully expanded immensely by my father. Its area was about equal to the entire first floor. Since the stones here in the dungeon have had their fill of blood in the past twenty years, the air down here felt dreadfully gruesome. The stone walls appeared slightly wet under the light of the candle flames, giving an appalling reminder that these walls have been coated in blood many times over. It seems that the rough stone walls have been used in the past to "grate" people with.

The child was crouching in a small individual jail cell with clean stone walls. In this dungeon that's always dark even when it's daylight outside, it would whit away at anyone's spirit. After all, human beings are instinctively afraid of the dark.

"Get up."

At my sudden line, the child's face raised in response. The expression on the child's face was exhaustion rather than the hatred shown for me earlier.

".....What did you come here for?"

"I've come to see you."

The child's voice had no more of the spirit from the daytime, it was slightly bitter instead.

"You're going to be executed as soon as the festivities are over. As complicity for your crime, the village mayor who had hired you, as well as his daughter, and the woman named Marley whose house you've been living in, and her two children as well are going to be executed along with you."

I forced down the bitter taste as I mentioned the punishment, and my voice came out colder than I expected.

"……What, why?"

"You ask why? What you just did was attempted assassination of Arxian nobility, since I'm the Viscountess and lord of the domain here. Adding in the crime of treason, you're now considered a heinous criminal. Surely you didn't think that this would end simply as a child throwing a rock at another child?"

The child who was hugging their knees in the back of the jail cell was now shaking and started moving. Slowly crawling towards me, the child's glittering dark eyes seemed like that of a specter's. The child gripped the iron bars of the cell tightly, and focused on me with a terribly calm expression.

"Even though you know that you're a criminal, you're going to punish the people in your domain to preserve your honor?"

……At that question which came from such a small child's mouth, I was both surprised and found it laughable. What a precocious child. This child's head was burning with a sense of righteous justice, but a lack of knowledge had invited misfortune.

"Is dying that scary? Or is it painfully tough that you've gotten those around you involved? Or maybe both?"

I tried my best to repress my slight smile as I asked. The child

was glaring at me with eyes that wanted to shoot me dead, but for some reason I find it rather fun.

"You caused all this with your own foolishness. Your punishment is in complete accordance with the law. Maybe I should take up my father's hobby and take pleasure in harming the domain's people."

"……What?"

"A country's laws, is there to protect its people. That would include the nobility as well. The nobility aren't regular people, they're the gears that move this country. ……If foolish people forget that and try to hurt others, this country could be destroyed. Such as my father."

Since this child hasn't received any education, I don't know if the true meaning of my words will be understood. I wonder just how impactful the ideas I borrowed from my previous life would be as a test. I didn't say anything else, and immediately turned around and left the child in the dungeon.

CHAPTER 14
SCALES OF KARMA

On the second day of my birthday celebration, a priest from the church would perform a ceremony to receive blessings. As soon as their plain horse-drawn carriage arrived in the morning, just like yesterday, today's plans went out the window.

"This is..... Faris-dono....."

As soon as he saw the priest get off the horse-drawn carriage, Earl Terejia raised his voice questioningly. Faris? The priest that was coming today should have been named Almenes. Even more surprising, was how shocked Earl Terejia had sounded at seeing Faris and the earl respectfully lowering his head. They must be quite a high-ranking priest.

Just before the priest bowed, our eyes met for an instant. The priest's pupils were absolute pure black, it raised goosebumps on my flesh.

The priest was dressed in white priest robes and a veil, with a black shawl on the shoulders, and was holding a sword and staff taller than their body in their hands, both age and gender were difficult to determine.

The head of the staff was decorated with a triangular symbol that represented balance scales, and the circlet that was holding their veil had an ornament that resembled having a third eye on the forehead. The balance scales were meant to judge a person's good deeds against their bad deeds, the eye was a symbol of how the Xia church could see through one's sins, and the sword represented punishment and order, and the god Misorua would give blessings.

“Siegmund. It’s been a while.”

The voice seems a little too low for a woman, but slightly too high for a man. The gender is getting even harder to determine. When Kamil took the person’s shawl for them, although he made a mockery of what a page was supposed to do, even though I could see the priest’s shoulder line, as expected I still couldn’t determine their gender.

“What happened to Almenes-dono?”

“Around this time of year, he’s been busy everywhere helping pray for the success of the spring festivities. Because of his accumulated fatigue, I’m replacing him today.”

Their skin and face still seemed young like a teenager’s, but their tone and attitude seemed like that of an old person. But why is it that there seems to be no sense of incongruity.

The two of them walked towards the mansion in silence. The priest named Faris had closed their eyes right after getting off the horse-drawn carriage and greeting the earl, without paying attention to me. Since even the earl is allowing this, I wonder just how high-ranking this priest is.

There were distinctions between priests, monks, and other clergymen. Priests are given their positions by the king, and would carry out various rituals for both the royal palace and temples, they belong to both the royal palace and the church. Since the earl is ignoring the fact that this priest didn’t even deign to greet me, a Viscountess, the priest must be at least at the level of a temple head or chief priest..... Comparing it with noble ranks, at least a senior earl in rank. I wonder why such an important person would take the place of their subordinate and come all the way out here.

“When will the ceremony be?”

“It’s planned for noon.”

Faris walked with long strides, at a fast pace. It's impressive how fast the priest's walking considering the difficulty of doing so with the length of the robe's hems, and that they're not walking so fast to the extent of being rude. Since I'm a child, sometimes people forget about that and I can't keep up.

"Until then, is it alright if I take a look at the garden?"

"……Of course."

Earl Terejia glanced at me. He probably wants me to return to the mansion first. If the priest wants to see the garden, it might mean that they have something to talk about. Otherwise, since the earl probably has more preparations to finish, it might be better though if somebody else had guided the priest.

Because of his status, Kamil hadn't said a single word this entire time, and we saw off the two of them to the garden.

In the Mansion of Golden Hills, there is no prayer room. Normally, it should be found in every domain lord's residence, but…… Several generations ago the Kaldia family head seems to have destroyed it, but because records of that time were few, no details remained. Because such a thing happened, I'm also interested in knowing why we haven't been excommunicated from the church yet.

Since there wasn't enough money to construct a new church here, the ceremony this time would be performed in a small church that's in the area under direct control.

The servants in the mansion had worked on cleaning here, so the church was nice and tidy. Inside, it resembled the chapels in my previous world…… I think. It felt a bit western and religious somehow, is all I knew.

Although I feel like it resembles a chapel, I actually don't remember most of the features in detail. After having spent six years already in a completely different world and culture, my

previous life's memories were becoming vague.

In the innermost part of the church was an altar. The altar was also decorated with a large sword and scales, and the symbol of the Ar Xia church, the third eye, was drawn on the tiles of the walls.

To me who had almost nothing to do with anything religious in both my previous life and this one, I couldn't help but feel like this was all very strange. Or maybe it's simply because the distorted light coming down from the stained glass skylight was too dazzling for me.

White cloth had been used generously for my own vestments. Since it had been made especially for this ceremony, there were no decorations and it wasn't ornate, and the length of my skirt and veil were just long enough to drag on the ground. I did my best to put up with the weight while progressing to the altar. There, the priest Faris was waiting for me with a staff and sword in each of their hands.

This ceremony was attended by very few people as most didn't know the details, it was just the presiding priest, the person that would receive the blessing, the person's guardian if they were a minor, and a non family member as a "witness," were all that were considered necessary for the good of the ceremony.

Because it was considered necessary for a person to eliminate their sins in order to receive the blessings of the gods, the ceremony also included a ritual where the sins of the person being blessed would be judged. That's why this ceremony was highly confidential compared to the others.

The state church of Arxia is the Ar Xia church. The sects belonging to this religion, are collectively considered part of the Xia religion. A millennium ago, St. Ahar had created the Ar Xia Holy Kingdom, creating the Xia religion's largest faction,

the Ar Xia church, and since St. Ahar had been a direct descendant of the Xia church's founder, the shrine maiden Xia Fema, it seems that they often called themselves the orthodox church.

Common between all of the Xia sects, were the concepts of sin, punishment, and law. In all the Xia sects, the holy words that the founder Xia Fema had left behind, the "Sacred Code," was treated as the holy scriptures of the church. This book had contained an advanced law system that's being used even today, and keeping order in society and living life with reason and ration is what Xia emphasizes.

The priest tapped me on my feet, shoulders, and forehead.

"And now I shall begin the ceremony of blessing. Daughter of Kaldia, Eliza, raise your face and know your sins."

I raised my head according to Faris's directions. The dishes of the scales on the altar, the left one indicated sins, and the right side represented virtues, it was customary for the nobility with their own territories to put the "Sacred Code" on the left side, and grains on the right side.

……That's why, when I saw what was actually there, my breath stopped for a moment.

On top of a piece of parchment in the left dish, was a sprig of poisonous hemlock. On top of the bundle of golden wheat in the right dish, was another sprig of poisonous hemlock for some reason. As if hiding in its shadow, a withered, tiny flower was there as well.

My heart was beating so hard it was painful. I suddenly choked, because I had forgotten to breathe. I felt a shock as if I had been hit in the head.

"The scales are tilted to the right. This makes up for your sins. Confronting your own sins shall be your punishment."

My brain felt completely numb, and Faris's voice swirled dully around me. Earl Terejia softly tapped me on my back as I just kept staring at the scales in a daze, and finally I was able to breathe again after having my breath caught in my throat.

A sprig of poisonous hemlock had been placed on both dishes. Its bright green color attracted my gaze.

Since when was it known? Why was it known? Was it Earl Terejia who knew? Or was it the priest Faris that knew somehow?

At the fact that somebody definitely knew about my major crime, my body trembled. As if my heart was filled with ice water, I felt my hands and feet turning ice cold first instead of my head which was still numb.

"Never shall you forget your own sins. – Now then, you shall receive Misorua's blessings."

CHAPTER 15
ACTING LIKE A CHILD

When the ceremony finished and I was allowed to leave, I immediately collapsed onto Kamil's arm. What's this, said the earl in an incomplete sentence as he met my eyes. As I saw my reflection in his quiet eyes, I forced a sound out of my throat.

"Since I'm still young, this ceremony really tired me out. I'm going to get some good rest."

From behind me, Faris's laughter seemed to catch up to my back and chase me. I felt an uncanny sense of fear, and even though I knew it was unseemly, I clung tightly to Kamil.

The left dish of the scales represented my "sins." That piece of parchment had listed the names of the 72 people in my domain that had died after I was born. And, the leaves of that poisonous hemlock. The people that I had let down, and my own parents and siblings. If that's my sin, I fully understand.

Since I had told them I wasn't feeling well, Kamil bid them goodbye for me, and set a quick course back to the mansion in order to get me some rest as soon as possible. I didn't the ability right now to think of anything, and I clenched onto him so tightly that my hands hurt. My fingertips were turning pale from a lack of blood circulation, and my nails that I had injured yesterday from clawing the dirt were beginning to hurt.

"Charlie, calm down."

As if he could see something was wrong with me, Kamil tapped me gently on the back. That prodded me to loosen my grip on him. I should stop hurting my own body in vain just because I was in a state of confusion, but I was still filled with

unpleasant feelings.

“……I don’t know what Charlie’s sins are, but your sins have been forgiven, and I’ve ascertained that you’ve properly received the blessings. Come on, take a deep breath.”

Alright, it’s fine, as Kamil shook my hand gently, giving some relief to the bitter taste in my mouth that had been spreading. Simply seeing me as a mere child and protecting me, his sweetness at this time made me think maybe he wasn’t such a terrible fellow after all.

Even though my sins are rather unforgivable, that priest had said that my sins were compensated for. The church is in charge of the justice system in this country, meaning my crime would not be called into question after what happened just now. However, there had been nothing related to repenting for my sins on the scales earlier. The atonement for my sins might not be over yet. Since I was clenching my teeth too hard and the grinding was beginning to hurt, it jolted me out of this train of thought. Kamil kept tapping my back to help me take large, deep breaths, and I changed my line of thinking.

So the crime that I’m responsible for committing is now known, but it’s unbecoming that you’ve become so unsettled over this, Eliza Kaldia.

By scolding myself, I calmed myself down, and went over everything in my mind that had frightened me.

The ice coldness I had felt during the ceremony wasn’t that strange, it was my brain sending orders to cool down my body as my blood was beginning to boil.

It doesn’t matter who that priest is.

The problem is whether or not that priest intends to do something against me.

Nor does it matter if everything about me had been exposed.

No matter how much they know, it should be fine if I just act like a child and pretend to know nothing.

“Kamil, let me down.”

My voice sounded ice cold when I spoke. Kamil who was just about to enter the vicinity of the mansion stopped his movements.

“……Charlie?”

“Let me down. I’ll walk by myself.”

I looked at the shocked-seeming Kamil directly, and as if he was flinching from me, he slowly let me down from his arms.

“Thank you for your trouble in helping me. Sorry for showing you such an ungraceful appearance.”

I looked at Kamil whose eyes were wide open and mouth was silent. Amongst the greenery, his red eyes seemed jarringly unnatural, and were glimmering with a color almost like blood.

I suddenly woke up, and rose up in bed. The water clock indicated that the time was about midnight. I have no recollections of having changed into my nightclothes. In the end, the priest Faris’s horse-drawn carriage had brought me back to the mansion, and I had been so fatigued that I probably fell asleep then and there.

The side table by my bed had a silver pitcher of water and a plate of fruit placed on it. I only drank the water, and got down from my bedsheets. Even though my floor is carpeted, the cold still started transmitting from my bare feet. Night in springtime is quite cold.

I put on an appropriate jacket and left my room. I headed straight for the basement dungeon. Why I was going there, I didn’t even know myself.

The chilly stone prison was just like a coffin. While my father had been alive, this had truly been a place for the dead.

I had a sudden urge to destroy this dungeon, but I somehow managed to calm myself down. Even though there's probably no need for such an overly large dungeon, and it might be better to get rid of it, right now I need to cooly evaluate my actions and not give in to impulses.

The child was in the back of the same jail cell as yesterday, and was sleeping in a thick and old blanket. How relaxed even though they might die tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. After thinking so, I was finally able to smile a bit.

"Whenever I come speak with you, I've gotten into the habit of becoming overly prideful."

I could take a high-handed attitude against the child that's been imprisoned by me, but I could only escape with my tail between my legs when my secret was discovered by the adults, my own shallowness and foolishness made me angry. My smile that had appeared changed to self-deriding laughter.

I gripped the cold iron bars so tightly that it hurt, and listened to the child's sounds of sleeping for a bit.

– The poisonous hemlock had been placed on both the left and right sides of the scales. On the same level as the sin of killing my entire family, having removed my wicked family was also recognized as a virtue. Even though my oldest sister had only been twelve years old, it's pathetic that people wanted her dead already. And now, when I'm only half as old as she was, people are wishing me dead in the same way, I feel like that's pathetic as well – my self-derision now changed into self-disdain after thinking about it.

And then, I thought about the withered flower that had almost been hidden. The priest had picked a flower that was used for graves, what a terrible person.

How rude to have toyed with my emotions like that. Having such an important evidence placed in front of me, I'd gotten distraught. What were the goals of the priest who toyed with my mind, and the earl who had allowed it? In the cold, dark dungeon, my head remained cool.

Nobody other than myself knows about what I've done, so that means they have some way of revealing past sins, does this means I have no way of escaping from the atonement? – Well, if that's what they want.

I thought over the events in the church again in detail. Thinking about it now, it really wasn't something to have gotten so shaken up over. I felt angry, embarrassed, and disappointed about how distraught I'd been.

The earl was probably disappointed in me as well. The fact that the list of 72 people that had died was there, was definite proof that he had provided that piece of evidence. At thinking so, my shoulders involuntarily dropped in frustration.

"I've found you!"

A voice suddenly spoke up from behind me, shocking me and causing me to tense up. By reflex, I reached for the sword in my waist. Oh, this voice was Kamil's.

When I squinted towards the dark entrance to the dungeons, in the dull light provided by the candles was the person I had expected.

"I mean, Charlie. Such a childish thing like running about outside your room at this time of night, if you were going to do it, couldn't you have started at an earlier age? It's suspicious because you're long past that age now."

Contrary to his words, his tone of voice was rather gentle.

"……You seem to be confused, since I am a child?"

"A regular kid you know, should have ran around, laughed,

and cried more. You never say anything, you're very observant, always obedient, and the fact that you can suppress your own feelings is incredible."

Kamil didn't hide his own incredulous attitude as he kept approaching me. Am I going to be brought back? I instinctively gripped the iron bars of the jail cell even tighter. I still wanted to think about various things here for a little longer.

But contrary to what I expected, Kamil stopped once he reached in front of me and simply put something on my shoulder. It was a slightly heavy woolen cloak that worked well during the winter. My clothes alone hadn't been enough to keep out the cold, but with this the cold air could no longer permeate through the clothing and reach my skin.

"If I'm bothering you, I'll wait outside."

Kamil suddenly chuckled. Why is it that, my throat suddenly hurt so badly.

"……No, you don't have to leave, won't you stay here with me for a little while?"

I had to squeeze those words out of my throat, but when they came out they sounded so soft and faint.

CHAPTER 16
WHAT I LEARNED AFTER MY SOCIAL DEBUT

It's the third and final day of my birthday celebration. In the halls that were normally empty, and the garden were quite a few people I didn't know. They were nobles from neighboring domains, and various nobles connected to Earl Terejia in some way. Although I know their names, it's my first time meeting them.

I killed my family at an early age, and I hadn't even gone out from the area under direct control until the day before yesterday, so I had no way of getting acquainted with other nobles. Having so many people gather here in the mansion, it's the first time that I can recall.

From my second floor window, I could see a deluge of various colors. Since I'm still a minor, the earl is taking care of greeting all the guests. The invited guests were waiting in the garden.

"That young man over there is Viscount Henznaut's only son. And, the person next to him in green formal knight attire is one of Earl Genas's sons."

"They're about at the age of graduating from school. If it continues to remain peaceful, it'll be beneficial for us to have good relations with them in the future."

Kamil stood next to me and helped me by providing information on the neighboring domains' nobles, since he had served as the earl's guard before during visits to other domains, he recognized them.

The nobles from the royal capital were mostly lower-ranked

nobles and nobles without their own lands, and having their children accompany them might be normal, but the smaller border domains' nobles often had commoners accompanying them instead. As a respectable noble from the royal capital, Earl Terejia who had a history of serving in the royal palace, whenever he visited neighboring domains, just like how he would have lower-ranking nobles serving him in the royal capital, he would bring servants along with him.

And, because there weren't all that many chances to visit the neighboring domains, it's really convenient how Kamil had gotten to go along with the earl every time.

Since it was plainly obvious, no matter how dumb Kamil was, since he was my retainer, the earl must have been trying to train Kamil and give him some experience. Today he's left Kamil by my side as well, which was probably something done on purpose.

And so, while looking at the nobles from the window, the earl's servant Bellway suddenly came up the stairs. This man is capable of appearing unexpectedly at random. I wonder if it's a requirement to be able to walk extremely fast as the earl's secretary.

"Eliza-sama, it seems that everyone has arrived."

"Got it. I'll be there soon. Kamil, get Rashiok."

"Yes, Eliza-sama."

In front of Bellway, Kamil didn't have his usual attitude, and I left him in charge of leading Rashiok. An extravagant mantle cascaded down from his shoulders.

Today, just like always, I was wearing formal knight attire, and today's was less casual and more formal than usual. The only slightly informal part was my longcoat. However, my mantle was heavier than usual, and annoyingly, I would become winded if I moved my upper body too much, but

there was no helping it. It would have been better if I could ride a horse like on the first day of my birthday celebration, when I had to walk, I suddenly felt my vexation increasing. I reflexively raised my right elbow to try and alleviate some of the weight, but Bellway softly chided me, saying “bear with it, it’s only for today.”

“Formal ceremonial wear is really so heavy.”

“It’s actually lighter than a dress. It’s because the undergarments are heavier.”

“……”

Bellway talked about women’s undergarments like it was nothing, to which I couldn’t reply and remained silent, as we headed downstairs to the first floor. At that moment, my attention was involuntarily caught by the face that appeared around the corner.

“Ahh, Eliza-sama!”

“Mrs. Galton……”

My voice sounded fed up, and although I wanted to come up with an excuse, there was no helping it. There was an abundant amount of soft, sheer fabric in her arms, and she was also holding onto a gaudy dress. Because today is the first day where I’ll be introduced to all the nobles, she had implored for me to at least wear a dress on the occasion, and had appealed over and over to anyone and everyone without regards for who they were.

“Eliza-sama, ojou-sama. Please, please reconsider, if you appear in front of all those nobles dressed like that, isn’t that just like you’re declaring that you’ll be working even though you’re a girl!?”

“And is something wrong with that, Mrs. Galton?”

I’m really fed up with her gender discrimination. Naturally,

my tone became rather harsh, and Mrs. Galton shrank back slightly from my pressure. I bet that Bellway behind me probably has a scary face as well.

"Without a doubt, I'm the lord of this domain. I have no relatives, and I can't afford to leave everything about managing this territory to Earl Terejia for the entire remaining time until I graduate from school. He's already quite elderly, I don't know when I might lose his protection."

I don't have the free time to continuously listen to Mrs. Galton's meaningless petitions. Especially right now, when important noble guests are currently waiting for my arrival. It's very regrettable that my nanny who raised me was unable to discern the proper time and place for things.

"If that happens, I'd have to govern this domain and its people entrusted to me by the king all by myself. That's why I'm learning. That's why I'll be appearing in front of the nobles as I am. Or, is there a problem with that?"

"That's....."

Seeing that Mrs. Galton was lost for words, since I was in a hurry, I talked over her as I passed her by. She's become more heated recently. Since I've grown and her duties as my nanny have been significantly reduced, I wonder if she's feeling frustration.

Whatever the case may be, if she doesn't calm down a bit, she'll become more and more isolated within the mansion. It might seem odd if I try to seriously confront her about her views, but luckily Bellway feels the same way I do and keeps her in check.

I could hear the band beginning to play their music. I stopped for a moment at the hallway door, to go over my appearance once more. Bellway reached out his hand, and

slightly adjusted the position of my scarf.

“Your sharp words just earlier, were quite refreshing to hear. If Eliza-sama really thinks that, the earl-sama will be pleased to hear that as well.”

“……Because I returned with an injury on the first day of my birthday celebration, I think it’s made me more irritable. Mrs. Galton’s actions, in her own way, are out of consideration for me and my future as well.”

“Yes, that’s true.”

Bellway didn’t smile as he replied, and he entered the hall without saying another word, so I followed him without hesitation. When the doors opened, brightness filled the entire hall as lights were everywhere despite it being noon. I glanced everywhere around me, but could not feel any fragments of favor from their eyes. Well, it’s nothing to falter over. After all, it’s common to first meetings. I got used to it even though it’s unpleasant. As expected of the guests gathered by the earl, there was no rude commotion to be heard from them at all.

Since it’s like this, while I can’t completely put aside the issue with Mrs. Galton, I decided to give up defending her. It’ll be terrible for me later if I’m inattentive and make a blunder.

Earl Terejia brought me around, and introduced me to the noble guests. Among the Arxian nobility, there are customs and manners that must be observed when introducing someone to one’s acquaintances for the first time. It’s that I’m not supposed to do anything as the guest of honor, and someone else shall introduce you to everyone. Meaning, I was limited from directly greeting people. I was introduced to nobles from domains we had dealings with, domains that we could build relationships with in the future, our neighboring domains, and nobles from the royal capital that the earl has known for a long time.

Since Kamil had been teaching me prior to this, remembering their names was a relatively smooth process. Guests from important domains that we would trade with such as Henznaut and Rogshia would have to be treated courteously, while I had to pay attention to not offend those from nearby strong domains such as Genas or Jugfena, it was quite tiresome.

Among them, there was a young man who strangely didn't seem disagreeable to me. He seemed young, probably just a little past twenty years old. He had snow white skin that I'd hardly ever seen since being born in this world, rare silver hair, and deep blue eyes. He must be from northwest of the royal capital, only the people from west of the Albus Mountains have such a special coloring, and my eyes were involuntarily drawn to him. He met my eyes, and broke into a faint smile. At his complete seeming lack of bad intentions, I actually started to think he was suspicious and only nodded back.

"Kamil, who's that person with the silver hair?"

When Kamil took a look at the young man I was indicating at, he seemed to be a little lost for a bit, until he finally replied in a voice lacking confidence in the answer.

"……I think that's Margrave Molton from the Foshubari region."

Foshubari…… the most northwestern region of the kingdom. Since it's rather far away, I only know the rough outline of the geography in that region. He's really come quite a long ways just to visit this backwater domain belonging to a junior viscountess. It takes almost a month to come here using a horse-drawn carriage. As a margrave, I wouldn't think that he has all that much influence in the palace, so I don't know why the earl would have invited this man here.

"Would you like to go greet him?"

"……Nah, it's fine."

Earl Terejia hadn't introduced him. Rather than spending time on him, I think I should be paying more attention to other nobles.

And so I drove that beautiful silver color out of my mind, and went back to watching Earl Terejia. The young man continued watching me for a bit. I could see him out of the corner of my eye, he was the only one in this venue who had something like a slight, soft smile at me for some reason.

CHAPTER 17
ELISE CHERSTOKA

Because an orphan from Shiriru village in the Kaldia domain had thrown a rock at Viscountess Kaldia, and caused her to fall off her horse, several villagers were punished and had to take responsibility.

The child that was the actual culprit in question was tied up in a jute sack and thrown into a river, while those that hired the child to do it, the people that the child was living with, and various other villagers associated were flogged in front of the other villagers. That was the rumor that reached the capital soon after my birthday celebration ended.

The Kaldia domain has no particularly noticeable features about it. However, the scandal about the previous lord Orville Kaldia's atrocities, and the family's deaths by poisoning in which only the youngest daughter survived, causing Marquis Rittergau's younger brother to have to become her guardian, were some of the biggest events to be gossiped about by the nobles in the past thirty years, the gossipy nobles in the royal capital with too much leisure time all had their attention on the Kaldia domain.

"- and that seems to be the current overview of the Kaldia domain in the royal capital."

"Thanks for your hard work, Kamil. Although it's within expectations, that they even know about the orphan incident means that the House of Lords really has nothing better to do than pay attention to what's going on here. It's depressing to think about that."

The other day, when the earl attended a meeting at the House of Lords, as part of the earl's retinue, Kamil had went

along with him to the royal capital for the first time. Even though I'm a noble, I still can't go to the House of Lords as I'm only six. But this means that the earl finally intends to take me to the royal capital soon.

The House of Lords, is like a government agency, which all Arxian nobility with peerage belong to. It's the highest level government body below the king, and it can do various legislative and administrative tasks apart from judicial ones which are left to the church.

As an aside, thanks to the existence of the House of Lords, there were very few other places for Arxian nobles to socialize. Very little diplomacy or politics was actually conducted there, it's simply become a place for nobles to have fun and show off their power, far from the church's values of being contented with honest poverty.

"So that means Charlie's surprisingly delicate?"

"What's this about surprisingly, how rude."

Kamil was just as imprudent as usual, and I began to massage the wrinkle between my eyebrows reflexively. I had said before that I would forgive his irreverence, and since I had memories of a previous life, I figured it would probably be easier to put up with Kamil's informal attitude rather than the alternative, I was finally able to organize my feelings recently.

I briefly summarized what I had heard from Kamil and jotted it down on a piece of parchment, sorted it away simply on my writing desk, and got up from my chair. The sunlight shining through the thick window panes felt so warm, it was making me drowsy. Recently the chill of spring had been fading, the long hours of sunshine in the summer were arriving.

I laid my head on Rashiok's belly while he was sleeping on the windowsill, feeling his smooth scales against my cheek as

he breathed. Rashiok woke up with a snort of annoyance as his nap had been disturbed, but even so he stretched out a wing and covered my body. Before I'd realized it, his wings had become wide enough to comfortably cover my small body. Even though his wings had only been the length of Kamil's arm when he came to this mansion, his growth rate is really quite something.

"Charlie, are you sleepy?"

"No, I'm just lying down for a bit. Let's go see how Elise is doing before noon."

– The residents of the Mansion of Golden Hills changed immediately following my birthday celebration. My nanny was changed, two girls were welcomed as my companions, and Kamil got his own small room as well. However, one of the girls "was sickly and had to recuperate right after she arrived." – That's the story.

"How's the food, Elise?"

"……"

In one of the innermost rooms of the mansion, I greeted the child that was lying in bed. Although I called her a child, she was actually three years older than me, and due to malnourishment she didn't seem older than me at all. Although she was now receiving good care every day, there was still something wild about her black hair, and her shining dark eyes were glaring at me. The gloves that covered her fingertips and the dress she was wearing don't seem to fit her image too well.

"The cook Nathan was worried about you and even went to the trouble of making it for you himself. If you don't properly eat your food, you won't have the energy to strangle me, 'Elise.'"

A jarring metallic sound resounded. From behind me, Kamil softly put a hand on my shoulder, hesitantly thinking to restrain me from something rash. On the bed of the dim room, the small child was trembling in anger.

"……So annoying. Besides, my name's not Elise. I'm Ratoka."

"No, that's wrong. The orphan named Ratoka from Shiriru village has already been executed. You're Elise Cherstoka, my playmate companion, and a girl belonging to the Mansion of Golden Hills."

"That's not it! ……I'll definitely kill you someday!!"

This time her chains were making a loud jingling sound. I laughed at her high-spirited appearance as she shouted at me. You've gone overboard, Kamil indicated to me by squeezing my shoulder more firmly.

"You, in the end, you're just a coward who couldn't even kill me!"

"Well, I have no idea what you're talking about at all. You're such a precious companion of mine that's come to visit my mansion, why would I have you killed?"

In anger, the child threw a pillow at me. However, since it was filled with light feathers it had little momentum, and it fell silently to the floor before it even reached me.

"Let's ask Nathan to prepare something that's easier to consume. Since she can't even get down from the bed, let's not make things too hard on her, right, 'Elise?'"

"Shut up!"

As I listened to her yell, I wondered if she was going to burst a blood vessel, as I left the dim room. I used a cheap provocation, but as long as she eats, then it's fine.

But next, just how long does Kamil intend to keep his hand

on my shoulder? However, his hand did not leave on its own. When I looked at him to see what was going on, he hesitantly opened his mouth.

"……Um, you know, Charlie. Why'd you decide to specially place that child close to you? You really might be killed in your sleep."

"It's not that I'm specially keeping her close. I'm keeping her alive because her dark red eyes could be useful. You can fool people with hair color, but eye color is the one thing that can't be changed. Even if she won't become a trustworthy retainer, there's plenty of ways to use tools."

When I said that, I saw something that I'd never seen before in Kamil's eyes. He furrowed his eyebrows while thinking something, but for some reason it didn't seem like he was condemning me. What is this feeling, I wonder. Even though I probably should have known it in my previous life, right now the current me had no idea.

A strong gust of wind must have blown outside the window, the leaves of the trees suddenly made a loud rustling sound.

"……If that's the excuse you're going to make to me, that means you don't think you need to tell me."

"Then, I didn't kill her, in order to use her. Because I wanted her to acknowledge me, I placed her beside me. Are you satisfied now, Kamil."

Silence enveloped the hallway. Kamil's hand dropped from my shoulder, and I saw him clenching his fists tightly. It seemed as if he disliked me looking at him, and he averted his gaze. I wonder if he's disappointed in me at this late hour.

He can think whatever he likes, and we continued under this strange atmosphere. This wasn't the only "Elise's" room we were going to. As we walked on in unnatural seeming silence, something heavy suddenly landed on top of my head. It was

loosely twirling around my hair, and I realized that it was Kamil's hand.

From his hand that seemed like it was comforting me, I finally remembered the emotion I saw in Kamil's eyes earlier. It had been pity. Kamil had felt compassion for me. However, as for why he would pity me, I still have no idea.

CHAPTER 18
TWO PIECES OF NEWS

As I was about to open the door, I could hear coughing from the other side. Cough, cough, it was dry coughing caused by asthma, it was a subdued female voice. I didn't enter this room rudely without announcing myself like I did with the earlier innermost room of the mansion, but knocked twice on the door first, and heard her say "please come in."

"Excuse me for coming in. How are you feeling today, 'Elise'-dono?"

The other "Elise's" room was much different, with a bright and airy interior, but the sound of coughing continued. On the bed was a girl who was sitting up. There was a rather tall maid who was running her hand up and down the girl's back, and she was looking this way.

"Eliza-sama."

"Good afternoon, Maya. How is Elise-dono feeling today?"

"After coming to this mansion, she's gotten a little better."

In the meantime, the girl's coughing reduced a little, and her breathing got slower as her asthma attacks stopped. Although a bit messy, the girl's brown hair remained lustrous as her maid Maya brushed it for her, and the girl finally raised her head after the maid was done. It was completely unlike the bitter expression at seeing me that the other Elise had, she had a gentle smile.

"My apologies, Eliza-sama."

"No, it's fine."

Her name is Elise Sherstok, and she's the Stadel domain

lord's niece from bordering north of the Kaldia domain. Although Viscount Stadel and I only greeted each other at my birthday celebration, he took a liking to the warmer climate in the Kaldia domain, and asked later if his sickly niece could come stay here to help her body recover. Elise's father, Baron Sherstok had land usage rights into my territory along part of the Kaldia domain, and he agreed to sell those back to us in exchange for taking in his daughter.

By the way, in Arxia, only nobles have land ownership rights. Even so, only nobles with peerage have their own lands, for example a viscount with his own domain, would have the authority to govern and tax the people that live there. A baron would only be allowed to use the land, so other than areas under direct control, he would have to rent out land to use.

The Stadel domain is a small territory at the feet of the Amon Nor Mountains, it's only known as a good place to avoid the heat during the summer, other than that it was just like the Kaldia domain in that it had no special products or noticeable features about it, the main difference being that there was a large difference in temperature.

Viscount Stadel and Baron Sherstok had been looking for a warm location for Elise to recover in for many years, and since Earl Terejia is now in charge of governing the Kaldia domain, after consulting with him, we were the first to come to an agreement with them.

Even diplomatically, because of my father, we had been isolated in all directions. There was no reason to refuse, and so we agreed to take in the other "Elise" and had her brought over here by ship.

"If you ever have trouble with anything, please don't hesitate to let me know immediately."

"Since everyone here treats me so well, I'm having so much

fun every day, so I think there'll be no need."

"That's great to hear."

Her voice was thin due to the asthma, but Elise was very mild-mannered and ladylike as she made conversation with a smile. We talked about the flowers that Maya and the gardener Boriswaf had picked for Elise this morning, and made other such idle chatter until I left the room, by the time I finally left, Kamil who had waited outside all this time seemed to have a strained expression. I beckoned him silently with my hand, and we headed for the domain lord's office.

After making sure we were far enough away from Elise's room, without having to ask him, he began his report to me as we continued walking without changing his pace.

"It seems that quite a number of refugees have reached Fort Jugfena."

"The farmers with the Shiru tribe?"

"There's an emergency summons from the House of Lords for a meeting. Not just the earl, Charlie as well."

.....Me as well? Since Earl Terejia has all the rights to govern as a domain lord currently, to even be summoning me, I wonder if it's finally time to gather troops at Fort Jugfena. An uneasy feeling started swelling over me, and I quickened my pace reflexively.

In the domain lord's office, Earl Terejia was busy putting away some documents, and his secretary Bellway was doing the same task with a serious expression on his face. There were several scrolls of blank parchment paper out, perhaps for emergency communications as several red homing pigeons were perched on the window.

Red homing pigeons have innate homing abilities and are

known for their vivid red color, as well as being the best species of messenger pigeon. Normally white pigeons are used for everyday communications, but red ones are used during emergencies to be able to tell the importance of the message at a glance. By the way, these birds, although they're called pigeons, they're actually about double the size of the pigeons from my previous world, since the window frame didn't have enough room on it, several birds were perched on the floor as well.

"You're here."

"Yes. I've heard that due to the mass influx of refugees, the House of Lords has summoned us."

"It seems that the Shiru tribe themselves aren't that close to our borders just yet. That's a relief for the time being. The House of Lords meeting is in four days. It means that there's no need for haste just yet."

Even as he said that, Earl Terejia hurriedly tied a piece of parchment to a pigeon's legs, and sent it off. By reflex, Kamil and I both looked at each other in response to the contradiction between his words and actions.

"Then, what's with this situation?"

"At this bad timing, Viscount Galbaito has passed away. He was unmarried and left no children behind."

Ehh, a sound of surprise escaped from my throat. Viscount Galbaito's domain borders Kaldia to the south, his territory had been between mine and Margrave Genas's domain, he had been someone quite young who'd just graduated school recently. Although I had heard that he was sickly, he had just come to my birthday celebration recently and greeted me.

Without minding that I was lost for words at this sudden turn of events, Earl Terejia continued the conversation.

“The only person with inheritance rights to the Galbaito domain is Margrave Genas. Both his son and his nephew are currently in high-ranking positions at the royal palace. Now then, Eliza, what do you think will happen to the Galbaito and Kaldia domains?”

I blinked at the sudden question. I get that Margrave Genas is going to inherit the Galbaito domain. That’s because the Galbaito family was originally a branch family of the Genas family, and Margrave Genas had been Viscount Galbaito’s father.

Eleanor Galbaito had been Margrave Genas’s second wife, and so their child had been adopted into the Galbaito family and taken their name, but Eleanor and both her parents, the previous Viscount were already deceased.

“It means that the Galbaito domain will be incorporated into the Genas domain. If that happens, then Kaldia will now border both the Jugfena royal domain and the Genas domain.”

“That’s correct.”

Earl Terejia nodded, and his eyes indicated that I should continue.

“……We’ll become the critical link in the supply chain against Rindarl.”

“That’s not all. This emergency meeting will probably decide if the refugees flowing in will be officially accepted by our country. If that happens, it’s almost certain that Kaldia will become the place to accept them.”

“If we take in the refugees, if that also leads to us extending protection to the Shiru tribe, it’ll mean our domain will become directly involved in war, is that correct?”

Earl Terejia silently confirmed my assumption.

“……Is there something that even I can do?”

“Of course. If we’re to be taking in refugees, preparations will be necessary. Because after the refugees, the Shiru tribe and Densel soldiers will be coming next. It’ll be impossible for Kaldia to remain uninvolved.”

I nodded at the earl’s words, while Bellway brought a large pile of documents out onto the desk. There were so many documents that it was scary to look at, but Bellway managed all of them just like usual with a smile.

“Alright, Eliza-sama, please go over these documents here. They’re contracts on cooperation with the neighboring domains. From these, please find and jot down everything related to defense cooperation with each domain on the parchment sheets here, it’ll be a great help.”

“I understand.”

Right as I sat in my chair, I saw Kamil working on yet another large pile of documents. To have both me and Kamil working on this, as expected it must be quite the imminent situation. Thinking that conflict with the neighboring country would likely become reality soon, my throat became dry.

End of Act I, Part I